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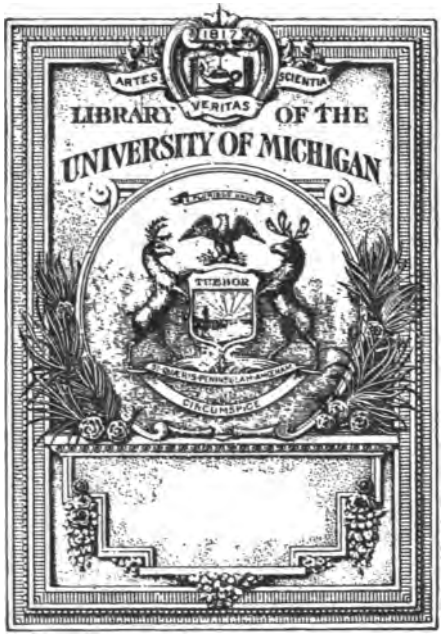
# THE WOMAN IN THE RAIN

## AND OTHER POEMS




THE GIFT OF

Mrs. L. B. Jones

Max R. Wald.

# THE WOMAN IN THE RAIN

## AND OTHER POEMS

# THE WOMAN IN THE RAIN

## AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER

AUTHOR OF

"THE WIRE TAPPERS," "PHANTOM WIRES," ETC.

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1907

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## DEDICATION

*WHAT bird that climbs the cool dim Dawn*
*But loves the air its wild wings roam?*
*And yet when all the day is gone*
*But turns its weary pinions home,*
*And when the yellow twilight fills*
*The lonely stretches of the West,*
*Comes down across the darkened hills,*
*Once more to its remembered nest?*

*And I who strayed, O Fond and True,*
*To seek that glory fugitive*
*And fleeting music that is You,*
*But echoes of yourself can give*
*As through the waning gold I come*
*To where the Dream and Dreamer meet:*
*Yet should my faltering lips be dumb,*
*I lay these gleanings at your feet!*

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From the
Library of Mary Wald.
Gift of Mrs. L. B. Jones
6-28-57

# Prefatory Note

"Sappho in Leucadia," in shorter form, was first published in London, four years ago. In the same year Ainslee's Magazine printed certain parts of the play dealing with Sappho's love for Phaon. Portions of "The Passing of Aphrodite" appeared in the Atlantic Monthly under the title of "Hephæstus." Likewise some of the shorter poems in this book have been printed in periodicals, and I am indebted to the editors of the following magazines for permission to reissue such verses: The Canadian, The Oxford, The Bookman, The Century, The Smart Set, The American, The Reader, Ainslee's, McClure's, Everybody's and Harper's.

A. S.

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# *The Woman in the Rain*

## THE PASSING OF APHRODITE

**(It was Zeus, the father of life, who gave Aphrodite, the most beautiful of the goddesses, in marriage to his son Hephaestus. Hephaestus, we are told, later found that his wife loved and was loved by his own brother Ares. So the husband, who speaks below, voluntarily surrendered the goddess to this younger and more favored brother.)**

THIS is the woman that the dreaming hours
Of all the world delivered unto you!
This is the woman — look! These are the eyes
That made the moonlight lean upon the sea
And filled the earth with pulsing loveliness
And turned the quiet winds of night to wine!
These are the lips that paved the world with pain
And threw a mist about you as you turned
Reluctant-eyed away! This is the breast
(While shield and sword and greave lay in the dew)
That made all waking life an empty thing
Once whispered of by ghosts in ghostly tones!
So take her, Ares! . . . As Demeter mourned

Through many-fountained Enna, I must grieve
A time forlorn, and fare alone, and learn,
Some still autumnal twilight by her sea
Pale gold with sunlight, to remember not!
For as the pine foregoes the pilgrim thrush,
I, sad of heart yet unimpassioned, yield
To you this surging bosom soft with dreams,
This body fashioned of Ægean foam
And langorous moonlight. Yet I give you not
The eluding soul that in her broods and sleeps,
And ne'er was mine of old, nor can be yours.
It was not born of sea and moon with her,
And though it nests within her, no weak hand
Of hers shall cage it as it comes and goes,
Sorrows and wakens, sleeps and sings again.
It was not mine to give, nor mine to guard.
Though all the stars were ours to sentinel
The night through which it moves, no god or man
Could chain and hold that heart, and call it his.
And so I give you but the hollow lute,
The lute alone, and not the voices low
That sang of old to some forgotten touch.
The lamp I give, but not the glimmering flame
Some fragile hand withholds, some mystic dusk
Enisles in Love's last naked loneliness.
The shell I give you, Ares, not the song
Of murmuring winds and waves once haunting it;
The cage, but not the wings that come and go.

I give them, Ares, as the passive earth
Gives up the dew, the mountain-side the mist!

Farewell, sad face, that gleamed so like a flower
Through Paphian groves to me of old, — farewell!
Some fate beyond our dark-robed Three ordained
This love should wear the mortal rose, and not
Our timeless amaranth. 'Twas writ of old, and lay
Not once with us. As we ourselves have known,
And well your sad Dodonian mother found,
From deep to deep the sails of destined love
Are blown and tossed by tides no god controls;
And at the bud of our too golden life
Eats this small canker of mortality.

I loved her once, O Ares —
I loved her once as waters love the wind;
I sought her once as rivers seek the sea;
And her deep eyes, so dream-besieged, made dawn
And midnight one. Flesh of my flesh she was,
And we together knew dark days and glad.
Then fell the change. Some hand unknown to us
Shook one white petal from the perfect flower
And all the world grew old. Ah, who shall say
When Summer dies, or when is blown the rose?
Or where the light of some lone torch becomes
The twilight and the shadow and the dark?
Who, who shall say just when the quiet star

Out of the golden west is born again,
Or when the gloaming saddens into night?
'Twas writ, in truth, of old; the tide of love
Has met its turn, the long horizon lures
The homing bird, the harbor calls the sail.
Home, home to your glad heart she goes, while I
Fare on alone, and only broken dreams
Abide with me! And yet when she and you
Shall tread those loneliest paths of mortal love
That mount and circle to the uttermost
White solitude of Rapture, and there breathe
Some keener air grown over-exquisite,
And look through purpling twilight on the world,
Dream not my spirit follows nevermore
Those glimmering feet that gladly walked with me,
Nor say my passion by your passion paled.

But lower than the god the temple stands.
As deeper is the sea than any wave,
Sweeter the Summer than its asphodel,
So love far stronger than this woman is.
She from the untiring Ocean took her birth,
And from torn waves and foam her first faint breath;
Child of unrest and change, still through her sweeps
Her natal sea's tumultuous waywardness.
And as she comes and goes one little cloud
Curls upward from the altar — but the grove
And god endure, and know not change or death!

Yet she shall move the strange desires of men;
Her mild auroral brow shall flash and burn
Before the world for other eyes than ours!
Yea, while you call her yours, a thousand youths
Shall live and die for her soft loveliness!
And you shall guard her as the Ocean guards
Its shores of tenderest green, till wave by wave
The melting hills surrender to the deep, —
But she will whisper through the silences
Of night when nothing seems to breathe and move,
And back in moonbeams she will come to them
Beseechingly, — and they shall be with her,
As leaves with light, as waters with the Sea!
For in her lie dim glories that she dreams
Not of, and o'er her rests a floating crown
Her Cyprian eyes ne'er saw; and evermore
Round her pale face shall pleading faces press;
Round her shall mortal passion beat and ebb;
And evermore as waves break white, and foam,
And die away on bars of brooding green,
Madly shall lives on her soft beauty break!
When yours she is, and in ambrosial glooms
You secretly would chain her kiss by kiss,
Though close you hold her in your hungering arms
And with voluptuous pantings you and she
Mingle, and seem the insentient moment one,
Yet will your groping soul but lean to her
Across the dusk, as hill to lonely hill;

And in your warmest raptures you shall learn
There is a citadel surrenders not
To every captor of the outer walls;
In sorrow you shall learn there is a light
Illumines not, a chamber it were best
To leave untrod!

O Ares, dread the word
That silences this timorous nightingale,
The touch that wakens strings too frail for sound,
The hand that crushes from the fluttering wing
The fragile wonder and the woven gold!
For, giving her, I gain what you shall lose;
Forsaking her, I hold her closer still.
The sea shall take a deeper sound; the stars
Stranger and more mysterious henceforth
Shall seem; the darkening sky-line of the West
For me, the solitary dreamer, now shall hold
Voices and faces that I knew not of!
More, henceforth, shall all music mean to me,
And she, through lonely musings, ever seem
As beautiful as are the dead.

But you —
You in your hand shall watch the withering rose,
Shall hold the loosened chord, the sundered veil,
The golden wings that ne'er can fly again!
So love your hour, bright god, ere it is lost,

A swan that sings its broken life away!
In that brief hour, 'tis writ, you shall hear breathe
From some enchanted home strange harmonies,
Then mourn life's silent throats for evermore, —
Yea, you shall find the altar when its fires
Turn ashes and the worship vain regret.
A mystic law more strong than all delight
Or pain shall each delicious rapture chill,
Exacting sternly for each ecstasy;
And when her voice enwraps you, and in arms
Luxurious your softest langor comes,
Faintly torn wings shall flutter for the Sun,
Madly old dreams shall struggle toward the light,
And, drugged with opiate passion, you shall know
Dark days and shadowy moods when she may seem
To some dusk underworld enchaining you.
Yet I shall know her as she was of old,
Fashioned of moonlight and Ægean foam;
Some visionary gleam, some glory strange
Shall day by day engolden her lost face;
The slow attrition of the years shall wear
No luring charm away, and she shall live
A lonely star, a gust of music sweet,
A voice upon the Deep, a mystery!

But in the night, I know, the lonely wind
Shall sigh of her, the restless Ocean moan
Her name with immemorial murmurings,

The sad and golden summer moon shall mourn
With me, and through the gloom of rustling leaves
The shaken throats of nightingales shall bring
Her low voice back, the incense of the fields
Recall too well the odor of her hair,
The white and rose and wonder of the dawn
Rebuild in my most secret heart of heart
The marble of her body touched with fire!
Yet life in time must put away the thing
That is no longer life; and as the leaves
Of other years are lost, each dream of her
Shall die and be entombed; and in the end
I quietly shall watch where hill and plain
Throb through their dome of brooding hyaline,
And see, from Athens gold to Indus gray,
From Albis down to Ophir, other worlds
Awaiting me, and unembittered go,—
Go down among the toilers of the Earth
And seek the rest, the deeper peace that comes
Of vast endeavor and the dust of strife.
There my calm soul shall know itself, and watch
The golden-sandalled Seasons come and go,
Still god-like in its tasks of little things;
And, woven not with grandeurs and red wars,
Wanting somewhat in gold and vermeil, shall
The Fates work out my life's thin tapestry,
As Sorrow brings me wisdom, and the pang
Of solitude, O Ares, keeps me strong!

## THE MODERN SPEAKS

WHEN I, who have joyed in my work,
Who have loved, have taken my fling,
Have hungered, forgotten, been glad,
Have hated the hand that would shirk
The honey of life for the sting,
Have housed with the good and the bad —
I ask, when the years shall bring
To this weariness need of sleep:
Be it not, gray Death, that I bend
When the salt, cold wind shall creep
Through the grim-houred slag at the end,
And the hulk drops out to its Deep —
Be it not that I shake and bend
At the thought of the End!

But if battered and torn and weak,
Should the flesh at the last forget,
In my might of a man I speak
With a strength that is mine as yet:

Though ground in the great slow mill,
And shattered and bowed with pain,

Though the hooves of the years are wet
With my blood and my tears of shame,
In the core of me, conquering still,
This man's good might shall remain,
And none of me, *me* shall you break —
But a reed, whereon Rapture has blown,
But a bugle that none can awake,
But a tomb that is coffin and stone,
But a torch now forlorn of its flame,
But a cage with the music all flown,
This, this you can shatter and take,
This husk of my days you can claim,
Not the Life I have known!

## OMAR KHAYYAM

DEEP in the spring their empty pitcher dips, —
Dips where of old a thousand sorrows fell.
Forget not while the gurgling water slips
Lightly from earthen throats, the silent Well!

## WAR

FROM hill to hill he harried me;
He stalked me day and night;
He neither knew nor hated me;
Nor his nor mine the fight.

He killed the man who stood by me,
For such they made his law;
Then foot by foot I fought to him,
Who neither knew nor saw.

I trained my rifle on his heart;
He leapt up in the air.
The screaming ball tore through his breast,
And lay embedded there.

Lay hot embedded there, and yet
Hissed home o'er hill and sea
Straight to the aching heart of one
Who'd wronged not mine nor me!

## ON AN OLD BATTLEGROUND

VALLEY and farmland meet the West,
Purple and gold and green;
Orchard and vineyard, song and rest
Where their old sad wars have been!

Over the gleaners lightly sings
The lark to the falling sun, —
Over that grave of far-off things,
And old wars lost and won!

And over the hills where long ago
Their old-world warriors met,
How sweet the purple vineyards grow,
How well the fields forget!

## A WOMAN SANG

I

THE low-toned Music rose, complainingly,
And like a languid tide through whispering reeds
In solemn unconcern it swept our souls.
We listened, and the silence fell again.
And then you sang.
Then through the waiting hush
Soft pleadings surged and broke and sighed away,
And falling note by note like April rain
Enriched our arid lives, and made old griefs
Take wing and seem no longer grief to us.
Regret itself, through easing Melody,
Was robbed of bitterness, and Memory
No longer sat alone with muted lip,
And Love, with all its tear-bewildered heart
And weariness of Joy, found voice again,
And seemed to walk with God!

You sang to us,
And through the pulsing silence breathed and throbbed
A haunting beauty that was more than prayer
And wingèd passion and too wide desire!

It made ineloquent each moaning string,
It left half-inarticulate each bow
That sobbed with broken sound, it sweeter was
Than all their brazen-throated instruments
Commingling cunningly; it soothed away
Earth's ages dark with pain and dissonance,
And we who most knew Life, remembered most!

Yet joyous too it was, this mystical
Soft measured sound and tone melodious,
That beat by beat like morning birds uprose,
That wave by wave like cooling seas assuaged.
As with some wine unknown it seemed to give
To wonder and slow speech the gift of wings.
Our old and long-houred glooms, before it, paled
To god-like unconcern; in past the gate
And sentry of grim Sorrow on the wings
Of song our hostage dreams flew home again;
And happiness, through Music, closer leaned,
And life, and all that we had thought that life
Should mean, because of Music, deeper grew!

II

Yet while your lyric soul flamed out its fire,
O Singing Woman who was naught to us, —
And lulled our ears with easing melodies,
We could not in your music be quite glad.
Joyous it seemed, yet joyous it was not,

This prodigal release, this grapeless wine
That gushed through all our soul and wakened life.
Weighted with sorrows old as Earth it was;
Burdened with records dark as night it fell.
For not as waters sing, nor wakened birds,
You sang to us who should have joyous heard,
Had we not seen too far beyond the bourne
Of Past and Future and been strangely moved
By undertones of half-remembered things.
For not in your rapt breast and body warm
This Song was born, nor of your spirit grew.
Deep in each note the ache of ages sleeps.
A thousand voices failed and paled for it;
A thousand bosoms grieved and sobbed for it;
A thousand decades aged and died for it;
And grimly through each slow-perfected strain
Across the hungry gulfs of time we hear
Thin echoes of each cry that gave it birth.
In undertone, from your untrammelled throat
We hear that wailing call original
Of earth's primeval Soul, a Pagan Thing
Still unappeased amid its lonely night,
A waking spirit in the twilight strange
A raucous Wonder groping up to God!
Yea, even when a child sings, thoughtlessly,
When song from her throat bubbles, as from springs
Sweet waters rise, and glad of careless life,
With girlhood eyes upon Tomorrow turned,

She sings most artlessly, and knows no tears
And no regret and no dark Yesterday,
Still deep entombed in her—is all the Past,
And groping from her heart to greet the day
Are strange persistent ghosts, and from her eyes
Peer pitiful and unperceivèd eyes!

III

For once, in fires of anguish now unknown
Was smelted this sweet silver of delight;
In earth's deep furnace of the Dead was fused
The gold of all this careless-noted Song.
For through this gift ancestral, thrice-refined,
Still down unto her babe some She-Thing barks,
Some uncouth heart shrills out its early hate,
Some ancient breast moans out its muffled prayer,
Some lust original gropes up to love.
Dusk æons, inarticulate, unknown,
Have huddled into you its crowded cries.
Out of your throat these throats of long ago
Wail and aspire, lament, caress, and pray.
A thousand nights of want have taught it grief,
A thousand hungers and a thousand tears
Have schooled it, see, to break and die away,
To touch our idler hearts with pleasing woe.
A thousand ghostly bosoms tenderly
Once nourished dark this root of regal song,
And women that you know not of, through you

As through a pipe, forever cry and plead;
Across the muffled strings of being stray
Their ghostly hands, with all their ghostly chords.
Deep under our glad grasses ever lie
The savage skull and ashes overgrown,
The ghosts that will not die, but day and night
Sweep through our lives, and pace our troubled hearts,
And make us sorrow when we would be glad,
And make us wonder when we should be wise.
We dwell upon the Dead, and day by day
We die a little that the world may live.
Thought-free we can no longer fare; we are
A haunted folk; our stillest eve is thronged
With spectral voices; our most quiet dawn
Is stirred with whispers from the tombèd past!

IV

And this immortal makes mortality,
This is the most that we may ask of life,
This echo of ourselves abiding still
In others, creeping up the slopes of Time
Where God and Aspiration stand as one!
And since all temporal things toward Beauty trend
To live, however slow they move and deep,
Let us be glad of Music, and more glad,
My troubled Soul, remembering 'twas man
Distilled through all the years this ageing wine
Of song, from Earth's dark ferment of first speech!

## NON OMNIS MORIAR

IN the teeth of the Word that bars my track,
In the swirl of the Ebb that sucks me down,
In the face of the storm that flings me back
On the wrath of a Deep grown mountainous-walled,
I, *I*, tide by tide, and tack by tack,
As far as the chains will let me free,—
I threading a course unbuoyed and black,
And feeling the Night where fanged rocks frown,
Ere the last spar fail shall have somehow crawled
To that Port whence shone no light for me;
Where wrecked, if you will, but unappalled,
I shall know I am stronger than my Sea!

## THE ANARCHIST

FROM out her golden palace Fortune thrust
A maddened dog, whose mouth foamed white with hate;
And loud he howled and gnawed the courtyard dust
And ground his teeth upon the iron gate!

## ON A CHILD'S PORTRAIT

DEEP in the fluted hollow of its shells
Dimly some echo of the Ocean dwells.

Still in September's fruitage mellow-cored
The filtered sweets of golden noons are stored.

And shimmering on a blue-bird's migrant wings
Some poignant touch of June's lost azure clings.

Still in the rustling sheaf to-day there gleams
The lingering gold of April's vanished dreams.

Still in the cell of one autumnal bee
I find lost Summer in epitome.

And all that better life that I would lead,
Writ small in this, one childish face, I read.

## AT THE TRAGEDY

FROM old Verona down the years,
See, crept this timeless cry
Of one great love grown soft with tears
And burdened with a sigh.

'Twas all this many a day ago,
And dim their world is grown;
Since then the drifting years like snow
'Twixt Youth and us have blown.

And yet you brushed aside a tear,
And drew one deeper breath;
With pain like to their sorrow, Dear,
As sleep is like their death.

The music sobbed itself away,
The great dark curtain fell;
And touched by all their foolish play,
I saw your bosom swell.

They, they knew Love — though all too late —
And happier, lo, they sleep,

Since for no Morrow now they wait,
  And for no change shall weep.

But Life with us, see, runs so thin,
  Our pale hearts take nor give,
And one great love comes seldom in
  The little lives we live.

And through our emptier days we weave
  Old sorrows long gone by,
And have but paltry things to grieve,
  And none for which to die.

So with mock loves and hopes and fears
  We people our poor days;
And freshened at Art's fount of tears,
  We go our careless ways.

We go our careless ways, and yet
  For some grim Venture yearn;
Then, daring not, with vague regret
  To opiate tales we turn.

For Life ran ruddier then, it seems,
  When men could love and die,
Than here with us who dream soft dreams,
  And no stern Fate defy.

So on you, watching, seemed to weigh
Their old dead fears again;
And for their grim and foolish play
You knew a moment's pain!

Yet 'twas not you who leaned above
Their stage and shed a tear,
At all their woe-entangled love
Across each widening year!

*'Twas that Love's ghost the ages gave*
*To you, and you denied,*
*That dreamed and turned in its deep grave*
*And asked why it had died!*

## THE FINAL LESSON

I HAVE sought beauty through the dust of strife,
I have sought meaning for the ancient ache,
And music in the grinding wheels of life;
Long have I sought, and little found as yet
Beyond this truth: that Love alone can make
Earth beautiful, and life without regret!

## THE OLD GARDEN

I

WHERE the dim paths wind and creep
Down past dark and ghostly lands
Lost this many a year in sleep,
Still an ivied sun-dial stands.

Still about the moss-greened urns
Fall the rose-leaves ghostly white;
Still the sunset flames and burns
In the basin's ghostly light.

Still the Satyr by its rim
Holds the marble reed he bore,
And the brazen dolphins swim
On the fountain's broken floor.

Still afar some evening bell
Creeps and fails, and sounds and dies,
Where the ghostly shadows dwell
Here beneath the quiet skies.

Here within the lichened walls
Sleeps a land forever old,

Where untroubled twilight falls
  On the casements touched with gold.

Here the quiet hours flow,
  And the years take languid breath,
Where the grasses only know
  Dusk and Silence, Sleep and Death.

II

Yet in some remembered June
  When the bird-notes ceased to ring
Down the echoing afternoon,
  Here a woman used to sing.

Once where still the roses climb
  Round her casements framed with green,
Wrapt in thought, O many a time
  From her window she would lean,

And when sun and birds were gone,
  With her cheek still in her hand,
Gazed across this shadowy lawn,
  To a dim-grown valley land,

Where a white road twined and curled
  Thro' black hills that barred the West,
And the unknown outer world
  Filled her with a strange unrest.

Here she wandered, brooding-eyed,
  Down each pathway fringed with box,
Where the hyacinths still hide,
  Where still flame the hollyhocks.

And across the whispering grass
  Where the ring-doves murmured low,
Oft her singing heart would pass
  In that lyric Long Ago.

Here tuberose and poppy red
  Saw her pause with lingering feet, —
On the sun-dial lean her head,
  Crying out that life was sweet, —

Asking Time, if Spring by Spring,
  When she walked no longer there
Other roses still could swing,
  Other blossoms scent the air? —

Weeping that she needs must leave
  Warmth and beauty, for the grave —
*Hush, what ghostly Voices grieve*
  *Where the regal lilies wave?*

III

Still it sleeps, this lonely place
  Given o'er to dusk and dreams;

But her sad and tender face
  Never from the casement gleams.

Still the ivied dial shows
  In its old-time wash of light
Noonday open like a rose,
  Though a shadow mark its flight.

Still the blossoms cling and bloom
  Deep about her window-square,
Still the sunlight floods the room,
  Still the tuberose scents the air;

Still it waits, her garden old,
  Still the waning sunlight burns
On the casements tinged with gold,
  On the green and muffled urns.

Still along the tangled walks,
  Though she knows them not again,
Wait the patient rows of phlox,
  Pipes the Satyr in the rain.

Though she comes no more to dream
  Here where she and Youth were one,
Faint and ghostly voices seem
  Still to frighten back the sun.

IV

Can it be that in some gray
  Twilight She shall swing the gate? —
Where in eager disarray
  Still her asters brood and wait?

Where her wiser poppy knows,
  And her valiant violets
Look and wonder, and the rose
  Round her darkened window frets?

*And these things that temporal seem,*
  *Rapture, Music, Loveliness,*
*Beauty frail, and passing Gleam,*
  *Shall outlive the hearts they press?*

*Since, we trust, each glory strange,*
  *Each vague hope Regret once gave,*
*Shall outlive all death and change,*
  *As earth's love outlasts the grave!*

## PHILOSOPHIES

WE know not what doth lie beyond the Door,
  But in captivity behold us grown
Enamored of our cell, in scrolling o'er
  With signs and legends strange each mural stone!

## THE SEER

ALONE on his dim heights of song and dream
He saw the Dawn, and of its coming told;
We on his brow beheld the luminous gleam
And hearkened idly, for the Night was cold.

Then clouds shut out the view, and he was gone;
And though the way is long and dark the Night,
And though our dim eyes still await the Dawn,
*We saw a face that once beheld the Light.*

## THE SONG-SPARROW IN NOVEMBER

ALONE, forlorn, blown down autumnal hills,
Floats sweetly solemn, fond and low,
One mournful-noted song that fills
The twilight, lonely grown with snow.

O shower of sound that more than Music seems,
O song that some vague sadness of farewell
Leaves crowned and warm with tears! — must all our dreams
Of deepest Beauty thus with Sorrow dwell?

## THE WOMAN IN THE RAIN

IN God's uncleansing rain
It sits and waits,
This huddled heap of rags and ashen hopes,
This timeless thing of mumbling unconcern,
That holds all coffined in its agued bones
The embittered lives of men.
And quietly
As withered grass, in that soft summer rain
It waits beneath the dripping green of leaves
Made light with city lamps. And down the square
Some pacing comrade thing, of painted mouth
And sodden lace, and foul perfumeries,
With all her opulent young bosom wet
By virginal warm rain, says three short words
To one she stalks, then arm in arm they slink
Out through the darkness, to their cruel sleep.
But still beneath the odorous dripping leaves
Waits, sloven-shawled, and gaunt, and gray of lip,
This tomb of old-time happiness that holds,
Corroding-limbed, so many ghostly loves.
With burned out eyes, and breasts all fallen in,
Sepulchral-like, she waits, soliciting
With querulous sharp claws she knows not what.

But now men pass her by with scarce a coin
Contemptuous, and still this flesh and bone,
That mocks what was a woman, must be fed.
So in the falling rain she shambles forth
On tremulous old feet, and drifts along
Those mad-houred gardens of delight that bloom
By dusk alone, to valleys strewn with lamps
And houses gay with laughter and much song —
And whines that she, too, was a beauty once
And took her pleasures lightly, and could laugh,
And prays her midnight sisters, while they have
A-plenty still to give unto the poor!
And leers at them, in wisdom all untoothed,
And quavers forth strange tunes they know not of,
And steps some broken dance, and whimpers out,
Through wheezy sobs, how wild she used to be!

Then forth she creeps into the muffling night,
She who once in her time most tenderly
Cared for her beauty, and was loved
By men who knew not what her laughter meant
Nor by what witcheries she ruled their hearts,
But round her perfumed langor wasted all
Their goodly hours and hated while they loved
Those lips where lay such anguish-hearted joy.
This, this lean leathery throat, these draggled whips
Of unkempt hair, these flat and wasted flanks,
This withered body fallen into ruin, —

All these have strangely moved the hearts of men
And wakened hot desires. And young mouths pressed
This flabby throat in houses thronged with light
And song and lavender . . . and died of it.
And once a sea of waving fire and snow
This bosom sighed and rocked with many heads.
And through her velvet veins once musically
The mad life sang, and full of luring warmth
Her young lips smiled, and much she knew of love.
And this same body, once with wonder clothed,
Once swept with passion and with pity crowned,
Entrusted once with beauty, that the torch
Might pass, a gift not hers, from hand to hand, —
This might have watched with unembittered eyes
The hour where promise and fulfillment meet,
The dusk where autumn and contentment walk.
This flaccid arm, it might have nursed and known
(As all the law of all its world ordained)
Its consolation and its mystery,
Its ultimate surrender and its gift,
Its solace for earth's uncompanioned years.
Yea, she who once so much yet little gave,
She might have watched with wide untroubled eyes
Her youth's lost beauty creeping through the chain,
The golden chain of Birth, to cheat the grave.
But she recked not the perilous gates of time,
And some stern army, hour by silent hour,
To each rose-sheltered battlement lay siege.

Like mailéd legions through some valley mild
And green with milky harvests, crushed and swept
Each grim invasion through her soft-veined life
(Low-breathing winds moved not more dreamily,
Deep-bosomed rivers far less quietly flowed!)
Implacably a secret warfare raged;
Battalions of brave scarlet, line by line,
Each day were overcome, each night, renewed,
And still again repulsed, and in the end
A torn and trampled battleground, a waste,
Her body lay, and she in time forgot
Each bugled thrill, each call out-trumpeted
From that high citadel where honor dwelt.
And with the years she aged, and fell away!

And this, soft-handed women, is the end
Whereto you come, who nurse so carefully
Your bodies delicate, and day and night
In milkless-bosomed unconcern of mind
Behold your beauty flash through many-teared
Dark cities tongued with records like to her!

O, felt such loins as these the April thrill
Imperative? Once, was it, in this hand
The Lord of Life Eternal thrust His torch
Of womanhood? This mockery of blight
And bone outworn, — must flesh like unto hers
Deriding stand the root of earthly love,

And still the flowering of life remain?
Is this grim hulk the gaoler of the years,
The guardian of the Dream? earth's far-off hope,
And warm, wide-bosomed solace both in one?
Is this a woman, — this the wandering fire
For which all Ilium fell, and wars were made,
And music fashioned, from the birth of Time?
O Aphrodite, brooding-eyed, is she
Your daughter? Juno, moonbeam-limbed and mild,
What is she now to you? to Sara stern,
To Magdalene made pure with many tears?
To hopeless-eyed Lucretia, who could drain
Her broken heart of all its tainted blood?
To Mary, white of soul, Cornelia chaste,
Or Joan the Illumed?

Young mothers grown
Dusk-lidded with sad pleasures touched of fire,
And finding peace where she destruction found,
Must she and you indissolubly sit
Thus bound with iron ties, until the end?
Must you, until the end, still answer for
These faded eyes, so dull and cavernous,
And in your breast feel burn her tears unshed,
And in your blood feel ache her woes unwept,
And out through her still gaze on Edens dim
And unattained? Too-happy women, warm
With earthly love, with angel honor white,

Soft women rose-enwrapt and lily-robed,
Behind each barrier dream these drunken hands
Still leave you naked to the primal night!
Down to the bitter end these bony claws
Out to your cradles reach, and strangle hope,
And tear each opiate veil, and unavenged
Fall grim between your stooping Christ and you!
Your stooping Christ! O Thou Who hast been called
The savior of the world, must still such things
Be borne of love? Must still thus wantonly
The golden chain of life be link by link
All broken for its gold? Must still the mad,
Dark, immemorial earthly rapture bear
Its fruit of bitter ashes? And must love
Lead out into the night thus hopeless-eyed
This thing that was not Youth, nor volant Death,
That is not Grief, nor joyous ever goes,
That was not Love, but one who Love forgot,
That was not Life, but one whom Life denied,
Glad now it suffers not, with sorrows in
Its empty laughter sadder far than tears,
And more than pain in its abysmal breast
Each short-lived old irresolute delight!

For round her throb and glow the valiant lamps
Of midnight cities she has never known;
Spices of Sodom, and strange musks of Troy,
The fumes of Karnac, and the myrrhs of Rome,

Cling destined round her tremulous old limbs
That once to languid music throbbed amid
The sultry nights of laughing Hamadan,
The golden glooms of Corinth, dark with sighs
That down regretful ages echo still!
For Thais and bold Phryne breathe in her,
Aspasia and Delilah, Jezebel
And Agrippina from her pallid eyes
Look forth with Lydian madness, and she hears
The plashing fountains of grey Babylon,
The breathing music of lost Nineveh,
Still steeped in golden moonlight and in sin!
And as she creeps in mumbling unconcern
Tonight more desolately sterile than
The rain-swept stones she paces, scarred and torn
With timeless centuries of huddled sins,
A menace and a taint, deep in her broods
Derisively earth's million-hearted ache!

## SLEEP AND DEATH

TWO sisters they; one wanton, light of heart,
Who takes us to her breast and laughs good-bye;
One chaste as ice, in her white room doth lie,
But him she loves, she never lets depart!

## IN THE OPEN

I HAVE thrown the throttle open and am tearing down
His track;
I have thrown it out to full-speed and no hand can hold
me back!
'Tis my arm controls the engine, though Another owns the
rail,
But for once I'm in the open and the yard-lights pass and
pale!

*Green lights! Red lights! He has hung His signals*
*out!*
*Caution here! Danger ho! And what's the man about!*
*'Tis true he owns the Engine, to do as he has done,*
*But how about the Final Word — when he ends the run?*

So from siding on to junction-point now I shall have my
day;
I have stopped to read no orders but I take the right-of-
way.
On the grade I thunder downward, on the curve I race
and swing,
For my hand is on the throttle and my heart shall have
its fling!

*Lights lost! Life lost! Flag, O flag the others back!*
*Switch the wreck! Ditch the wreck! Dare any block*
*His track?*
*There creeps into the Terminal the man who had his day,*
*But I wonder, O my soul, just what his God will say!*

## WHITE NIGHTS

THE sea sobs low on the dune
Where a wave awakens and dies,
And the whippoorwill mourns to the moon,
And a slumberous night-wind sighs.

With its passion the Dusk is still,
And the tide turns back to the sea;
And the Night creeps over the hill,
And my heart, my heart to thee!

## THE WORDLESS TOUCH

THE sun on autumn hills, a twilit sea,
The touch of western gold on paling wings,
Soft rain by night, the flute of early birds,
And wind-tost children voices, — these to me
Wake thoughts that sleep beyond the bourne of words,
Yet whisper low: "Whatever Life may be,
Mocked as it seemed by vague rememberings,
Thou, thou hast lived before, and known these things!"

## THE KNIGHT ERRANT

HE rode at dusk down woodlands strange,
Where stood all bathed in fire
A great dark Tower whose shadow gloomed
The Valley of Desire.

Alluring glowed that sun-lit Tower,
But dark the way, and long;
And where the walls seemed pearl and gold
The gates stood doubly strong.

Life lay with all its wrongs to right,
  And all its deeds undone;
Earth held full many a height to storm,
  But he must take this one.

We knew that castle of delight
  Was death to him who knocks,
Where roses screened the granite walls
  And lilies hid the locks.

We told him how ten thousand men
  Had failed and fallen there.
" Her eyes," he sang, " are like the stars;
  Like ripened wheat her hair! "

We laughed our laugh, for we ourselves
  Of old had heard these things.
But hearkens he to any man,
  The youth who fights and sings!

He, watching there each casement dark,
  By dawn and dreary dusk,
Lay siege unto those mystic walls
  Of lily, rose, and musk;

And saw by night, from turrets dim,
  Some dubious signal start;
— *We* knew each sign, we who had sought
  The fortress of her heart —.

In loneliness and gloom and cold
His hungry youth went past.
" Lo, all ye tribe of Puny Things,
How one great love can last! "

The pitying stars shone over him:
Still flamed his sword on high.
" Her mouth," he sang, " is like the rose,
And white her soul, say I! "

But lo, he beat the dark gates down,
And there his fortress lay
Four lonely walls wherein all life
Had fallen to decay.

Each old retainer, night by night,
In silence crept from her;
And one by one her vassals died,
For all her musk and myrrh.

Starved aspirations, hopes, regrets,
From her white body stole,
And left her there a woman dead,
And with an empty soul.

Four walls, she stood, from whence the last
Embattled rose had blown;
" I yield," she gasped, with goodly art,
" Take all that is your own! "

Beside that castle grim he wept —
  We heard him, in our sleep —
" Tis not, O God, the life I gave,
  And the tares that I must reap."

" Of battered not of rusting swords
  Thy knights, I know, are made; —
O, 'tis not, God, that in this fight
  You broke me as a blade! "

" But ah, so empty lies this thing,
  Why barred she not each door
And sent me singing through the Dusk
  Of my grey Dreams once more! "

She laughed her laugh, and swept the blood
  From off her granite stair,
For down the wood a strange youth sang:
  " Like golden sheaves her hair! "

*The pitying stars shone over him,*
  *He shook his sword on high.*
*" Her mouth," he sang in turn, " is red,*
  *But white her soul, say I! "*

## MORNING IN THE NORTH-WEST

GREY countries and grim empires pass away,
And all the pomp and glory of citied towers
Goes down to dust, as Youth itself shall age.
But O the splendor of this autumn dawn,
This passes not away! This dew-drenched Range,
This infinite great width of open space,
This cool keen wind that blows like God's own breath
On life's once drowsy coal, and thrills the blood,
This brooding sea of sun-washed solitude,
This virginal vast dome of opal air —
These, these endure, and greater are than grief!
Still there is strength: and life, Oh, life is good!
Still the horizon lures, the morrow calls,
Still hearts adventurous seek outward trails,
Still life holds up its tattered hope!

For here
Is goodly air, and God's own greenness spread!
Here youth audacious fronts the coming day
And age on life ne'er mountainously lies!
Here are no huddled cities old in sin,
Where coil in tangled langors all the pale
Envenomed mirths that poisoned men of old,

Where peering out with ever-narrowing eyes
Reptilious Ease unwinds its golden scales
And slimes with ugliness the thing it eats!
Here life takes on a glory and a strength
Of things still primal, and goes plunging on!
And what care I of time-encrusted tombs,
What care I here for all the ceaseless drip
Of tears in countries old in tragedy?
What care I here for all Earth's creeds outworn,
The dreams outlived, the hopes to ashes turned,
In that old East so dark with rain and doubt?
Here life swings glad and free and rude, and I
Shall drink it to the full, and go content!



## BESIDE THE MARTYRS' MEMORIAL

(OXFORD)

THEIR sterner God we have long since forgot;
We creed to shifting creed our wonder give,
Yet from the ashes of dead faiths that lie
On Age we whisper: Theirs the happier lot,
Who found this narrower faith, by which to live,
Who knew this darker God, for whom to die!

## DREAMS

THROUGH Sleep's blue dome wheel fondly to and fro
Ten thousand Dreams, their wings all tinged with gold.
Home, home to us they come across the West,
A golden flurry of glad wings — but lo,
In the dark pines of Mem'ry where they nest
One mocking feather is the most we hold!

## THE DAUGHTER OF DEMETER

GODDESS and Mother, let me smooth your brow
And cling about you for a little time
With these pale hands, for see, still at the glow
Of all this white-houred noon and alien sun
I tremble like a new-born nightingale
Blown from its nest into bewildering rain!
How shall I tell thee, Mother, of those days
My aching eyes saw not this azure sea
Of air, unknown in my grey underworld
And only whispered of by wretched Shades,
That pace the Dusk and will not be at peace!

Or how I often asked: " Canst thou, dark heart,
Re-dream the music of the rain? Canst thou
Recall the gold above the black-crowned pines?
Canst thou, my heart, remember Home, so far
And long forlorn, still think of Sicily?
Then didst thou, weeping, call Persephone
The Many-Songed, and where thy lonely voice
Once fell all greenness faded and the song
Of birds all died, and down from brazen heights
A blood-red sun long noon by sullen noon
On ashen days and desolation shone;
And cattle lowed about the withered springs,
And Earth gaped wide, and arid Evening moaned
Along her empty rivers for the rain!
The milkless ewe saw not its fallen lamb,
The mummied seeds remembered not the Spring,
The broken hives stood bleaching in the sun,
The unused wine-vats cracked, and overturned
The oil-jars lay, and from bald hill to hill
The white smoke drifted, and the world seemed dead!
Yet thou in anger didst withhold the green,
And grim of breast forbade the bursting sap;
And dared the darkest sky-line of lone Deeps
For thy lost daughter, and could find her not!

Then came the Arethusan whisper, and release;
The refreshing rains washed down and gushed
And sluiced the juicy grasses once again,

The wet leaves dripped with laughter, bough by bough
The soft invasion of the vernal green
Made glad the world and sang through every hill,
And bird by bird the Summer was reborn, —
And drooping in thine arms I wakened here!

Yet all those twilight days I was content,
Though silent as a frozen river crept
The hours entombed, though far I was from thee,
And from the Nysian fields of open sun,
The sound of waters, and the throats of song.

Yet when with happier lips I tell thee all
Thou must, worn Mother, leave me here alone
Where softly as the snow each white hour falls
About my musing eyes, and life seems strange,
And strange the muffled piping of the birds,
And strange the drowsy music of the streams, —
The whispering pavillions of the pines;
And more than strange the immersing wash of air
That breathes and sways and breaks through all my being,
And lulls away, like seas intangible,
Regrets, and tears, and days of heavy gloom.
O Mother, all these things are told not of
Where I have been, and on these eyes estranged
Earth's poignant sweetness falls so mystical
Its beauty turns a thing of bitter tears;
And even in my gladness I must grieve

For this dark change, where Death has died to me, —
For my lost Gloom, where life was Life to me!
Long years from now shall ages yet unborn
Watch the returning Spring and strangely yearn!
Others shall thrill with joy like unto mine!
Vague things shall move them and strange voices steal
Through sad, bud-scented April eves to them!
Round them shall fall a glory not of Earth,
As now o'er these Sicilian meadows fall
Dim memories that come I know not whence!
In lands I know not of some sorrowing girl
Shall faintly breathe " I am Persephone
On such a day! " and through the world shall run
The immemorial rapture and the pang;
And pale-eyed ghosts shall creep out to the light
And drink the sun, like wine, and live once more.
The dower of my delight shall make them glad;
The tears of my regret shall weigh them down,
And men with wondering eyes shall watch the Spring
Return, and weep, indeed, these selfsame tears,
And laugh with my good laughter, knowing not
Whence came their passing bliss so torn with pain!

For good is Enna, and the wide glad Earth,
And good the comfortable green of grass
And Nysian meadows still so milky pale!
Good seems the dark steer in the noonday sun,
The nibbling herd that sounds unto my ears

So like a quiet sea on pebbly shores,
The ploughman's keel that turns black waves of loam,
The laughing girls, the fluting shepherd boys;
And beautiful the song of many birds!
Good seem these golden bees whose busy wings
With wavering music drone and die away, —
The orchard odors, and the seas of bloom;
And good the valleys where the green leaves breathe,
The hills where all the patient pines look down;
Good seem the lowland poplars bathed in light,
That pillar from the plain this tent of blue, —
The quiet homes amid the cooling fields,
The flashing rivers, and the woods remote, —
The little high white town among the hills!
All, all are good to look on, and most dear
To my remembering eyes. Each crocus, too,
And gold narcissus, gleams memorial,
Untouched of sorrow for that troubled day
Impetuous wheel and hoof threshed thro' the wheat
And 'mid these opiate blooms the Four-Horsed One
Swept down on me, half-lost in pensive dreams,
And like a poppy in some panting noon,
All drooping, bore me to the gates of Hell, —
When on my fragile girlhood closed his arms
As on some seed forlorn Earth's darkest loam!
Yet think not, Mother, this fierce Son of Night
Brought only sorrow with him, for behold,
In learning to forbear I learned to love;

And battling pale on his impassioned breast
I felt run through my veins some golden pang
Of dear defeat, some subjugation dim,
Presaging how this life must bruisèd lie
Before its wine is ripe, how ere its fruit
Is fashioned it must be deflowered,
How ere this breast of mine could utterly
Be glad or beautiful it must be crushed!
Thus are we fashioned, Mother, though we live
Immortal, or the sons of men; and so
Each day on my disdain some tendril new
Bound me the closer to him, loving not,
Some wayward bar of pity caged me down,
And day by languid day amid Death's gloom
I grew to lean upon him, and in time
I watched his coming and his absence wept.
I walked companion to his pallid shades,
And mild and pale as yonder midday moon
I dwelt with him, a ghost amid his ghosts.
If this was love, I loved him more than life,
And now he means to me what flame and war
And shrill of bugles over serried steel
And the tumultuous conflagration of great towers
And ruined citadels must mean to eyes
Of martial men, bewildering as wine,
And sweeping on to any maddened end!
I came to glory in him, felt small hands
Clutch at my breast when he was standing near,

And knew his cruel might, yet thrilled to it,
And in his very strength took vague delight.
Stern were his paths and troubled, yet he stooped
Still patient-eyed above my weaknesses
Until I saw, in wonder, from the weeds
Of lust original the rose of love,
And link by link found all my life enchained!

Only at times the music of the Sea
Sang in my ears its old insistent note, —
Only at times I heard the wash and rush
Of waves on open shores and windy cliffs, —
Only at times I seemed to see great wings
Scaling some crystal stairway to the Sun,
And languid eagles shouldering languid clouds!
Singing on summer mornings too I heard;
I caught the sound that sweet green waters make,
The music — Oh, so delicate! — of leaves
And rustling grasses, and the stir of wings
About dim gardens. Where shy nightingales
Shook their old sorrow over Ida's gloom
I into immortality was touched
Once more by song and moonlight far away!
Beside dim fires I mused and made my dreams
And through soft tears rebuilt some airier life
Untouched of time and change, and so forgot
My sorrow; and the first of all the gods,
With Memory and Aspiration walked!

For, Mother, see, this dubious death in life
Has clothed with joy and wonder all the world!
My ways, of old, were but phantasmal stream
And shadowy flower and song that was not song;
And wrapt in white eternities I walked
A daughter of the gods, who knew not Death!
I was a thing of coldness and disdain,
Half reading all that lay so sealed in dream,
Half losing all that lay so deep in life!
Enthroned in astral taciturnities,
And looking tranquil-eyed on beauties old,
I faced one dull Forever, strange to Hope,
And strange to Sorrow, strange to Tears, Regrets!
Joy was not joy, and living was not life!
So unreluctantly the long years went,
Though I had all that we, the gods, have asked,
Drunk with life's wine, I could not sing the grape,
And knew not once, till Ades touched my hand
And made me wise, how good the world could be!

Now, now I know the solace and the thrill
Of passing Autumns and awakening Springs;
I know and love the Darkness, many-voiced,
Since Night it was that taught me to be strong,
Since doubt it was that schooled me to be wise!
The meaning of all music now I know, —
The song autumnal sky and twilit seas
Would sing so well, if once they found the words —

The sorrow of dear shores grown low and dim
To darkling eyes that may not look again,
The beauty of the rose enriched by death,
The happy lark that hymns amid the yew,
The mortal love grown glorious by its grave!
For worlds and faces now I see beyond
The sad-aisled avenues of evening stars;
The Future like an opal dawn unfurls
To me, and all earth's dreaming Long Ago
Lies wide and luring as the open Deep.

And so, still half in gloom and half in sun
Shall men and women dwell as I have dwelt.
Half happy and half sad their days shall fall,
And grief shall learn beside the open grave
How beauteous life can be, how deep is Love!
As snow makes soft grim Ætna's green, so tears
Shall make our laughter sweet; and lovers strange
To thee and me, grey Mother, many years
From now shall feel this thing and dimly know
The bitter sweetness of this hour to me,
Whom Life has given unto Death, and Death
Back unto Life — both ghost and goddess, lo,
Who faced these mortal tears to fathom Love!

## ON THE OPEN TRAIL

THIS narrow world with a low-hung sky
Like a little tent around it
Too cramped I find for a home of mine,
Too puny have I found it!

Since I was ever a vagabond,
A vagrant-foot and rover,
O give me the width of the skies to roam
When my earthly days are over!

— Once more where stars for the milestones stand
And the unresting worlds walk my way, —
Out, out where a man has elbow room
To travel an open highway!

And when the journey is done God grant
That one lone Inn I find me,
Where I may enter and greet — but Her,
And close the door behind me!

## NIGHT TRAVEL

O NEAR lights, and far lights,
And every light a home!
And how they gladden, sadden us
Who late and early roam!

But sad lights and glad lights,
By flash and gleam we speed
Across the darkness to a light
We love, and know, and need!

## UNDER THE STARS

SO high above, Sad Heart, our heavens bend,
These longing hands touch not their lowliest star!
Yet down from those vast unimpassioned skies
May yearn, from where we dream all sorrows end,
May yearn tonight some heart through saddened eyes
Unto this world, where we and Sorrow are!

## GIFTS

I THANK Thee, God, for good and bad,
For all the tangled skein
Of blows that made my manhood glad,
And joys that were a pain!

Defeat I thank Thee for, and strife,
For all Thou didst deny,
Since he who lives the lightest life,
The darkest death must die.

And he who doth a star pursue
Both home and fire must leave,
As he who guards a life or two
A death or two must grieve.

And he who wins shall lose again,
And having lost, shall win,
Since they are strong who saw great pain,
And wise, who once knew sin!

## TWO CAPTIVES

MOURN not for him: he doth no captive dwell
Who beats and gnaws the bars that bind him so,
Who, thrice immured, still hates his cage too well.

But pity him who no such pangs can know,
Who, long-enchained, and grown to love his cell,
Should Freedom lean to him, stands loath to go!

## WHEN CLOSING SWINBURNE

THE Greeks of old who sang to flute and lyre
Half schooled coy Melody to walk with Speech;
Here madly, lo, she yields to his desire,
And lovers grown, they mingle each with each!

## THE SHADOWING GODS

"I SCORN your empty creeds, and bend my knee
To none of all the gods adored of men, —
I worship nothing, that I may be free!"
"Mayhap," said one, "you kneel to Freedom then!

## KEATS

ALL over-thumbed, dog-eared, and stained with grass,
All bleached with sun and time, and eloquent
Of afternoons in golden-houred Romance,
You turn them o'er, these comrade books of mine,
And idly ask me what I think of Keats.

But let me likewise question you round whom
The clangor of the Market sweeps and clings:
In Summer toward the murmurous close of June
Have you e'er walked some dusty meadow path
That faced the sun and quivered in the heat,
And as you brushed through grass and daisy-drift,
Found glowing on some sun-burnt little knoll
One deep, red, over-ripe wild strawberry? —
The sweetest fruit beneath Canadian skies
And in that sun-bleached field the only touch
Of lustrous color to redeem the Spring —
The flame-red passion of life's opulence
Grown over-sweet and soon ordained to death!

And have you ever caught up in your hand
That swollen globe of soft deliciousness?
You notice first the color, richly red;

And then the odor, strangely sweet and sharp,
And last of all, you crush its ruddy core
Against your lips, till color, taste, and scent
Might make your stained mouth stop the murmur:
"This
The very heart of Summer that I crush!" —
So poignant through its lusciousness it seems!
Then what's the need, Old Friend, of foolish words:
I've shown you now just what I think of Keats.

## THE SHADOW

ONE soul there is that knows me as I am,
Reads each pretence, sees through each futile sham;
Goads me with scorning lip, with laughter dry,
Yea, dogs me step by step: *my better I!*

## UNANOINTED ALTARS

*"LET it be," said he, "that the hounds shall win,*
*Let it come that I bow to the curs,*
*And stand a fool in the eyes of the world,*
*But, O never a fool in hers!"*

It was not for the sake of the things they sought,
Nor the foolish crowns they cried for,
Nor for any of all the ancient gods
Their fathers had fought and died for!

It was not, he knew, for the name of the land,
Nor the pride of the loins that bore him;
Not, not for these did he die his deaths,
And crush to the goals before him!

*"Let it be that the ancient jest holds good,*
*Let it come that I bow to the curs,*
*And stand a fool in the eyes of the world,*
*But, O never a fool in hers!"*

So the years that he wrought were empty years,
And the laurels he won, their laughter;

But other than his were the mouths that pressed
This mouth that he hungered after!

Yea, the years that he wrought seemed wasted years,
And his goodly strength was broken,
And his shrivelled heart lay dry as dust, —
But the word was left unspoken!

*Yet he stood, at the end, in their wondering eyes,*
*(For all that he held them curs)*
*Far more of a god than a fool, indeed, —*
*But a fool to the end in Hers!*

## ON A CHOPIN NOCTURNE

HE desolate and saddened sought the gleam
Of that white summit where lone Beauty dwelt,
And mid its calm some ghostly marble found, —
Yea, in its tranquil snows his broken dream
Of Beauty moulded . . . and we watch it melt,
As Music, into April showers of sound!

## THE WANDERERS

DRIFTING from Deep to dark-horizoned Deep,
Sea-worn we fare through unknown islands lone
To unimagined mainlands lonelier still.
Out past gray headlands, with o'er-wistful eyes
We gaze where pathless waters pale and gloom
And tumble restlessly all touched with gold
Deep through the darkening West, — and talk of Home.
Then like the rustling of soft leaves to us,
Then like the whispering of evening waves,
Across the twilight silences there come,
Borne in upon the sea-wind's languid wings,
Soft hidden voices and strange harmonies,
Far sounds from hills and shores unknown to us,
Low strains that creep and fail like solemn bells
Across a windy plainland, cries that lure
Us onward and still onward toward the End,
Through foam and spindrift to the uttermost
Dark undiscovered Country of the Dream,
Strange intuitions telling us there lies
Some wider world about us than we dream,
And wayward memories of how we fared
From coasts too far away for feeble thought!
They come as broken voices blown to us

From out a land of twilight too remote
And muffled in deep mists to be discerned.
One wind-blown echo comes, one teasing strain,
And while we listen with bewildered ears,
The music mocking dies, the glory fades,
The fragile tone dissolves, — and leaves us there
Amid the gathering silence and the gloom
With some new anguish eating at our hearts,
And some dark mem'ry washing restlessly
Upon the granite bastions of Regret.
What it would whisper now we cannot tell,
And so, with sullen oar yet watching eyes,
We still fare on past thresholds still unknown,
And question whence we come and whither go;
And ere the dawn is gray again we quench
Doubt's sinking fires and drive the splintered keel
Deep through the black waves and go plunging out,
Out past the headlands of the open sea,
With straining sails and wills more obdurate,
On through the dark horizon of unrest,
Still onward, ever onward, to the End!

## AT THE COMEDY

LAST night, in snowy gown and glove,
I saw you watch the play
Where each mock hero won his love
The old unlifelike way.

(*And O were life their little scene*
*Where love so smoothly ran,*
*How different, Dear, this world had been*
*Since this old world began!*)

For you, who saw them gaily win
Both hand and heart away,
Knew well where dwelt the mockery in
That foolish little play.

(" *If love were all — if love were all,*"
*The viols sobbed and cried,*
" *Then love were best whate'er befall!* "
*Low, low the flutes replied.*)

And you, last night, did you forget,
So far from me, so near? —

For watching there your eyes were wet
With just an idle tear!

*(And down the great dark curtain fell*
*Upon their foolish play,*
*But you and I knew — Oh, too well! —*
*Life went another way!)*

## AN EPITAPH

O WOMAN-SOUL, all flower, and flame, and dew, —
Through your white life I groped once up to God
In happier days: you lie beneath His sod,
And now through Him alone I grope to you!

## THE MAN WHO KILLED

I

The speaker is Cain, crouched in a grove of matted shadow and sunlight, beside the body of his brother Abel. This body lies close by an overturned jar of oil, at the foot of an altar-cairn of rough and smoke-stained stones. Near it, grains and fruits, brought for sacrificial offering, wither in the hot noonday sun . . . . . Cain, in an agony of apprehension that slowly grows to terror, at the sight of the first of the race of man to be overtaken by Death, peers down at the body, while at times his mother, Eve, is heard singing in the distance. . . .

WHAT pulsing warmth is this that oozes through
Your matted hair?
What makes so horrible
These hands of mine, that fawn upon the throb
And gush of rivers which they cannot stanch?
What voice was that? . . .
. . . Oh, whence came all this blood?
What wild bird screams and calls so loud? . . . O God,
What is this wonder creeping down his face,
His piteous face so white and stained? What wind
Is this that sighs so low across the world?

*Eve is heard singing out of the remote distance:*

*The silence went out of the day,*
*The sorrow passed out of the west,*
*For bone of my bone he lay*
*Warm on my wondering breast!*

*Each valley where Loneliness crept*
*Grew vocal and golden and warm,*
*For son of my loins he slept*
*Close in my wondering arm!*

Speak. . . . Speak! . . . ere on this altar-rock I beat
My maddened head, or tear this unknown ache
Out of my loins, and in relieving gloom
Lie at your side!
But no . . . no, not as you,
All huddled in such hideous unconcern,
Thus ugly, stark, with brutish mouth agape
In foul black-blooded slag! No, not
With sightless eyes where glazing terrors seem
To crawl, with each half-mucid limb inert,
Where, for one breath that ended in a scream,
You writhed and twisted with some hellish thing,
You fought and struggled with some Fear unknown,
Then like a burnt-out faggot drooped away,
And moved not in the dust!
Speak out, swart throat,
Speak out again and boast of this grim strength
That woke and bore me down! But cry aloud

That all is well with you, that in your time
You will remember, will be hot to strike
And hold your own! . . . O, Abel, speak!
One old-time word of hate is all I ask.
What is the Thing that steals thus over you?
Can it indeed be Joy? Or is it Pain?
What wreath of heavy Wonder has my hand
Crushed on your startled brow? What mystery
Is this that I have clothed your body in?
Past what unseen Abyss have you been thrust?
What ache is this, unknown to all the world,
Eats through my dizzy veins? Why should it seem
That you have gone beyond some lonely Door
That shuts me out, and leaves me desolate? . . .
Earth's green things I have seen return to earth,
Days I have seen thus fade away and droop,
Tides I have seen go out, and Summer pass
Beyond earth's iron hills . . . yet all again
Came back — there lies the wonder! — came with joy
To us again!

*Eve in the distance is again heard singing:*

*The silence went out of the day,*
*The sorrow passed out of the west,*
*For bone of my bone he lay*
*Warm on my wondering breast!*

The noon grows old; the tide
Turns back, and loud his lost ewes bleat. . . . But he
Wakes not, — he who, one little hour ago,
Was livid with a rage that crushed me down!
I feared and hated then his panting might,
His man's good sinewy strength. But Oh, I dread
Him more, thus meek of hand and humble-eyed,
Here where he sprawls dishevelled in the sun,
So ominous! And his poor gaping mouth
Rebuked me not, though with my heel I spurned
His parted lips, that panted, and were still!

*Far away Eve sings once more:*

*The birds at the Dawn may awake,*
*The birds in the Dusk may depart,*
*For the song on the paths that I take*
*Is sung by my sheltering heart!*

What new word on the lip of waiting Time
Is this earth hears? How in one little sound
Like that he uttered could be sloughed away
The might that made him wonderful and quick!
What god-like thing pulsed out through this small wound
No wider than a leaf? What mystery
Has crowded through a gate so small as this?
Are you the thing that fought and flung me back?
Are you the voice I heard on morning hills?

Are you the warmth I felt on nights of rain,
The valiant motion and the flame-like speed
That swept like wind and fire through gloomy
woods? . . .
And this limp hand once dared sheer crag and sea,
And cunningly has builded in its time,
And yet can shade not from the cruel sun
These staring eyes, that watch I know not what!
If you are wiser now than I am wise,
If out through dark and distant worlds you look,
What are these wordless horrors, what this woe
Abysmal, what this black engulfing sea,
Mirrored in eyes that answer not to mine?
Speak to me once, Stark Terror, for I fear
The noise of leaves and grasses when I watch
You lying thus! Until you wake, I dare
Not look on God's wide hills of awful light!
I fear, from now, the accusing-fingered Hours;
I fear the voices fugitive and thin
From every calling thicket, and I fear
The whispering wood with all its twilight ghosts,
Its snakes of vine, its hateful spears of thorn!

O fling close round me, God, Thy moonlight's gloom!
Thy muffling midnight silences send down
And shroud me in grim isolation, drench
Me in oblivion! Let lone-houred Night
Companion me upon my stealthy ways —

For I it was who flung the first red blot
On earth's green breathing fields, — I, I it was
Who first thrust sorrow in the sound of winds,
And tainted life with blood!

II

**The speaker still is Cain, beside his brother's body, now lying in the quiet gloom of a rocky cave, opening towards the East. One thin and wavering column of smoke rises from a sheaf of unripened grain saturated with oil, smouldering on a flat stone nearby. The smoke makes the air of the cave thick and grey.**

How long is it, —
How long, O aching silence, has he lain
Here where I thrust him from the ways of Eve
Our Mother, and from all the wheeling stars
That seemed to watch and understand his eyes,
And their white emptiness? I hid him deep,
Yet from my own grim sight could hide him not!
For in wild fear, by root and brake and rock
I dragged him from the light. Then at his side
All through the endless afternoon, all through
The still, dusk, stifling evening, and all through
The midnight full of little cries, I watched.
Eden shone gold against the eastern sky,
Dawn crept dull grey across the world, and still
Close at his side I watched, that if he slept
He yet with sun and bird might wake again.
Blood-red the morning grew, green waters stirred,

The leaves forgot their silence, loud the birds
Broke into song, and nearby grazed a ewe —
But still this dull face washed with pitying tears
From tangled leaf and grass saw not the light,
Nor did he move again!
And then I knew!
Then through my veins a desolation black
With horror crept and burned, for I that hour
Stood face to face with Death! Shrilling, my fear
In one great cry rang down the very gloom
Of Hell's most inchoate murk, and hungry gulfs
Of isolation sucked each echo in,
And all the vaulted galleries of Woe
And nether anguish in that hour I knew!
From Eden's obdurate walls the flaming swords
Of angels flashed thrice deep, while drunkenly
I fell and grovelled, and cried out to Thee,
O God, in pity yet to veil Thy sun,
To still keep dark a little time Thy dawn,
And all Thy careless crying things strike dumb!
I evermore must frenzied turn and feed
On my own fears, some pitiful content
Tear from this heart, foreknowing in each bone
The End toward which I crumble day by day,
The worm toward which I ripen hour by hour!
Stung into thought I stand, and from this day
The balm of dreams remedial must seek;
For Adam, when he walked the first wide night

And saw the threading stars enweaving slow
The fringes of God's grey infinitudes,
Felt not this loneliness of soul that makes
Me marked of men!
All time to me the world
Shall homeless lie! Back from those hills where *he*
Now fares a hostage I shall ever cringe,
Since at his twilight bourne of Emptiness
He stands to bar my way, to fling me out
On desperate life and days with terrors strewn.
He died but once, yet I a thousand times
In maddened thought must die, and wake, and die;
And all the woe of our torn father thrust
Once out into the night, was naught to mine
This reeling hour!
O, blast, God, with Thy bolt
This awful air so hushed I cannot breathe!
Deep, deep in Thine unfathomed solitudes
Hurl me and hide me till the wings of Time
Have withered into dust! O, do Thy worst, —
God, lash me and drive me like a broken leaf
Down Thy dark worlds, confound me as Thou wilt,
But rend this silence that about me broods!
O calm me with some doom quite adequate!
Strike quick, and have it done, for how, indeed,
Canst Thou once blight this guilty head with fire,
How fiercely crush this hand, that first lured Death
Into the world, and brought this timeless ruin

To one so warm with movement and with dream?
White sleeper, you who once were strong to act,
Who found earth beautiful, and joyed in life,
Yet from this day must slowly be demeaned
And darkened into dust and be forgot,
Can you not wake but once, and plead for me?
O, tongue so eloquent one day ago
And now so silent grown, but sigh to me
That all His dews, His soft assuaging rains
May yet from earth's glad grasses wash this blot,
As here I wash your body with hot tears!

. . . . . .

Nay, o'er you keeping watch I draw the scent
Of carnage still unknown, the savor thin
Of deaths untold, and ulcerous hates unwombed,
Hot rapine, war, and conflagrations wide!
From this day down unto the last slow throb
Of mortal time, life shall a burden seem
To me, and all my sons in sorrow born!
Old fears shall whimper in our ageing veins,
Remorse and gloom with me and mine shall walk.
My children and my children's children sprung
From these dark loins contaminate all time
With undefined new dreads shall tainted go.
Down ashen years unknown, while gazing out
With eyes still unconsoled into the West
Where swim eve's placid stars, the heirs of strive
For ever shall be mocked with dreams of Peace;

And Love, o'er-desperately sought, shall be
As bitter ashes in their sated mouths
To madden them. And while they weep, the swords
Of angels golden in the dusk of Time
Shall guard life's lonely Edens unforgot;
And hating death, man still by fire and sword
Shall die, all torn by predetermined war!
Immitigably this old wound shall ache
Down all the ages, for my sons must bear
The curse and brand of Cain, although I fling
Hot life's retrieving seed across strange lands, —
Though in o'er-passionate dim futile thirst
Of days continual, I people thick
The ages and the loneliest fields of earth, —
Still shall I not atone for this first blood!

## ON A PORTRAIT OF R. L. S.

WAS it this dun and sombre-breasted bird
Who sang so gladly, with a throat so frail!
Not for his crest, but for the songs we heard,
Let us remember then the nightingale!

## NORTHERN PINES

I PASS where the pines for Christmas
Stand thick in the crowded street,
Where the groves of Dream and Silence
Are paced by feverish feet.

And far thro' the rain and the street-cries
My home-sick heart goes forth
To the pine-clad hills of childhood,
To the dark and tender North.

And I see the glooming pine-lands,
And I thrill to the Northland cold,
Where the sunset falls in silence
On the hills of gloom and gold!

And the still dusk woods close round me,
And I know the waiting eyes
Of my North, as a child's, are tender,
As a sorrowing Mother's, wise!

## ON RE-READING HAMLET

I

O GOD, if this were all!
To see the naked Right,
And then by day and night
To crush o'er Circumstance,
Despair, and petty Chance,
And fight the one good fight!
O God, if this were all!

II

If this were only all!
But, ah! to see, and yet
Half fear the waves that fret
Beyond the Harbor Bar;
To strive not, since the star
Lies from us, oh so far;
To know, and not forget!
O God, that this is all!

## THE SINGERS

WISTFUL by the door they wait,
Tired of all their dusty mart,
Dreaming we go desolate
Since from them we dwell apart!

Wistful in the Night they cry
Through their wall'd and cramped abode,
While they hear us trooping by
With the moonlight on the Road!

Mad we are and glad we are,
Housed by all this goodly Home
Roofed by sun and wheeling star —
With the whole wide world to roam!

What each jocund day shall give
That we take and go content;
Singing out the life we live,
— And they watch in wonderment.

And they never once shall know
What the solace or the quest,

As they see us come and go,
  Fluting down their lonely West.

Till they wait as children wait
  Round our swart and mystic band
And like children, soon or late,
  Listening humbly, understand!

## RICHES

WASTED and all in rags his starved soul went,
  And, opulently paupered, he grew old
And crouched with loaded hands and heart forespent,
  A beggar, with a million bits of gold!

## WHEN THE KING COMES INTO HIS OWN

WE who knew the True King well,
We who loved and served him long,
Cleaved to him whate'er befell —
We who when they did him wrong
Could have faced the Hounds of Hell
With a cheer and snatch of song —

While re-crowd about his throne
Those who serve when all is fair,
Knight by knight oft tried and known
We shall stand close round him there,
When our King comes to his own —
Stand with humbled heads and bare,
While a great shout — one alone —
For the True King rends the air.

With that cheer shall die the flame,
With that day, the tale be told!
Never, Comrade, quite the same
Those who come and serve for gold!
*We* went ragged, knew no shame,
In those lean, glad days of old!

So, all out-at-elbows, grim,
  Hand by hand on swords a-rust
(While his Kingly eyes are dim
  And his God, he knows, is just!)
We shall sadly kneel to him,
  King and Cause we took on trust —
Then past plain and mountain rim
  Ride away all stained with dust!

## THE SEEKERS

KNOCK, and the Door shall open: ah, we knocked
  And found the unpiteous portals locked.
Waiting, we learned us croons to while along
Those dreary watches — and ye call it Song!

Seek, and thine eyes shall find: Oh, we have sought
The Vision of our Dream, yet found it not.
We limn its broken shadow, that our heart
May half remember — and ye call it Art!

## DEATH AND A CHILD

TO us who watched thine earliest days,
Who knew so well thy childish ways,
Oh strange it seems that Death should turn
That gloomy face so gauntly stern
Aside to thee, — thou wert so young,
And to thy childhood language clung
A touch of that strange spirit tongue,
That softer language of the skies,
God's angels spoke in Paradise.

Did Death grow envious that we
Should half forget His majesty?
Deep did He strike, to make us feel
He still expected we should kneel!
We dreamed not He would deign to come
And strike such childhood babbling dumb.
Such pitiable small talk as thine
Had never led us to divine
Death hearkened closely to each word
Thy brooding mother scarcely heard.
Was it her own o'er-wistful gaze
First drew Him from His wonted ways
To that sad wall of angels' wings

That guarded thy last slumberings,
Where He, half tired of coquetry
With those who bowed a willing knee,
No longer in mere dalliance smiled,
But showed His power, and took a child?

. . . . . .

Thy little hand has clutched His hand,
And we no longer understand
How once we deemed Death so austere.
The old-time face we used to fear
Has lost its ancient horror now,
Since that inexorable brow
Once smiled and bended over thine.
Yes, lighter-hearted Proserpine,
To us those glooms where thou art gone
Can never more be Acheron,
Yes, one weak, childish hand has hurled
The terrors from that Underworld!

## LIFE AND LABOR

HERE on a languid deck how tranquilly we float!
Seafaring now seems easy, thanks to — call it coal! —
Who blames us all for idling, on an idle boat?
*Fools, stand and watch one moment in the stokers' hole!*

## LYONORS OF LYONESSE

FROM her dark tower she lightly threw
To him three roses red;
He spake no word as near he drew,
But bowed his troubled head.

Two lilies white, for Innocence,
Burned on his shield, like flame;
He dare not view those ramparts whence
Such sin-dark roses came.

For her red mouth was wise with love,
No shame her laughter screened,
Where, moonlight-bosomed, she above
His wall-bound pathway leaned, —

Since clad in mail he rode for Christ,
And strait the path he trod;
Nor scorned he to be sacrificed
For his most jealous God.

But from her rose-grown tower she came,
And laughed into his eyes.
He flushed to his pale brow with shame,
And spake unto the skies:

" To Christ this woman yet shall bow,
Or be cast down! " he said.
" Yea, where she flaunts her scarlet now,
Shall float the Cross instead! "

She laughed where swayed his spear aloft,
For she no arms did wear;
All her slim body, white and soft,
Of steel and mail was bare.

Her embattled eyes broke into song;
A challenge paled her cheek,
For in her weakness she stood strong,
He, in his strength, lay weak.

She, in twined gold soft-helmeted,
Cuirassed in yielding rose,
From her wise pleading mouth of red
Let fall sweet words for blows.

Oft had he fought in his stern mail,
But no such fight as this;
She crept where he stood stunned and pale
And his sad mouth did kiss.

He said no word, but on his face
Like fire her red lips burned;
He said no word, but from that place
Broken and bent he turned.

She saw him sered and stricken seek
His lonelier paths again;
Then two strange tears crept down her cheek,
And she was crowned with pain.

She sank before him on the ground,
And clasped his iron greaves;
And wept forlorn where she had frowned, —
Her hot tears fell like leaves.

" This man took not my wanton kiss,
He stooped and shamed me not!
I ne'er have known a man like this, —
And such I need, God wot! "

But, trembling, he still sought the way
That lightly, once, he trod,
And riding whispered: " From this day,
I need thy strength, O God! "

But like a little child, she wept;
Then laughed, that it was so;
And watching long, like one who slept
And wakened, saw him go;

And saw, with widened eyes, that hour
A beauty known not of
From her torn body break and flower,
Yet dreamed not it was love,

But prayed, that night, for his pure soul
And thanked her new-found God
That he had gone unhurt and whole
To that white world he trod.

She dreamed not once, how like a sword
Still through his visor press'd
Her perilous face, how each soft word,
Like thorns, still tore his breast.

She dreamed not of the fight he fought, —
Till lo, he crept again
To her with his high vows forgot, —
And then she knew his pain!

Then on his fallen sword she wept;
From where his arms did cling
About her conquering knees, she leapt
And cried, " I did this thing! "

" But ne'er the white steel of your soul
Was mine to break or save!
From its soiled sheath, unscathed and whole
It still shall flash and wave! "

" For me," she cried, " for God, you must
The godly knight remain! " . . .
And through his naked heart she thrust
The sword his hand would stain.

On his dead mouth she pressed one kiss,
And " God, I thank thee ! " cried,
" For giving me the strength for this;
That spotless, see, he died ! "

Then on her woman's breast she bound
His coat of mail that day,
And with grim plume and armet crowned
Rode e'er for Christ, men say !

## IN THE TEMPLE OF NEPTUNE

(At Paestum)

THE old gods wane, and new gods come,
And men where Deities once dwelt
Bend puzzled knees, and find them dumb, —
These gods to whom their fathers knelt.

If in no temples far or near
To earth's new-given gods we bow,
Let us still kneel to Beauty here,
Who bears her god-head on her brow !

## THE SONATA APPASSIONATA

IN distant rooms, above sad wind and rain,
She, who her grieving heart could utter not,
Weighed down with wearied love's too-golden chain,
Lures from low keys this glory tear-enwrought;
And with bent head I listen, and I know
(As he once knew, who through her speaks again)
That gladness, at its greatest, walks with woe,
That music, at its deepest, dwells with pain!

For luting through Earth's loneliness and gloom,
A second Orpheus of more frenzied soul,
He came to us, who groped as from a tomb
For that free air down which his music stole.
He, from his more harmonious world of song
Crept in to us, who dreamed with heavy eyes
And heard his lyre, and then could only long,
Half madly for life's unremembered skies!
And, like Eurydice, we yearned again
To tread some lost and more melodious air,
Where once we too had known that happier strain
And once our exiled feet were wont to fare!

A gleam of lives more golden but long gone,
  A thin, strange echo of celestial things,
Came to us, and forgotten glories shone
  From out the fires of Earth's rememberings.
Then, then we knew our Dusk once had its Dawn,
  And all those dreams that tease our mortal breast,
All, all those ways we would, yet could not, reach,
  All, all our vain desires, our old unrest,
In Song he woke, that long had slept in speech!
  For he had heard those chords Uranian
That must divinely madden him who hears;
  And they on high beheld the god-like pain
That mocked his soul, and closed his mortal ears!

So thou, sad earthly exile, on low keys,
  Through wind and rain, in quiet rooms afar,
Seeking this immemorial ache to ease
  And flinging forth against each mortal bar
Once more his immemorial harmonies,
  With hands that are as wings, from star to star
Now bearest me away, past earthly seas
  To some old Home, where God and Music are!

## MY FRIEND, THE ENEMY

SINCE your fierce hate has so befriended me,
Who shall oppose you, watchful to the end —
Since 'twas your covert blade I might not see,
Made vigilant this breast I must defend —
Still keep my sword from rust and slumber free,
And since on blow and parry souls depend.
Call no soft truce to break my strength, but be,
In endless opposition, still my friend!

## THE MUSICIAN SPEAKS IN CANDOR

KNOW him, whose art ye fondly blame and praise,
As but a reed, whereon some Hand unknown,
God-like, to lute ineloquent, e'er plays
The one old ineffectual monotone!

## SUNSET IN THE FAR NORTH

LOW in the west the sullen mountains lie,
White-fanged and gaunt, against a blood-red sky,
Where starved and wolfish, stalked from height to height,
Day gnaws upon its last thin rind of Light!

## A WOMAN'S HAND

THE dawn grew golden in the east,
The dancing and the music ceased;
The world, the world of men, awoke,
And then the guest who tarried spoke.

And as he spoke he took her hand
In his — he could not understand! —
And held it, tiny, white, and slim,
While she in silence gazed at him.

" Soft little tender bird-like thing,
May time, and toil," he murmured, " bring
No line to thee, poor girlish hand! "
— For he could never understand! —

Then she, with one strange wistful look,
Drew back the hand he idly took,
And, smiling, hid it from his gaze
While he bent low, and went his ways.

The little hand remained the same
Soft bird-like thing, and no toil came

To take its tenderness away
Or steal its beauty day by day.

For in the world its only part
Was but to press a woman's heart
— Oh wayward hand so white and slim! —
That ached with all its love for him!

## THE AGE OF LAUGHTER

STILL drugged with Song, and gay with Laughter, lo,
How round the board they feast, while gaunt-eyed grown
Here squats their outcast Fool, and asks how show
The solemn stars, and questions what is known
Beyond the Shadows that affright men so
They needs must drink! And flute and pipe are blown
In reassuring mirth, and glasses flow,
And much brave laughter wakes, and floor and throne
Reflect the valiant lamps. . . . And yet they know
That out beyond the Door no light is shown,
And in the end they one by one must go
Home through the Silence of the Night — alone!

## SHE SEEMED A WILD BIRD

SHE seemed a wild bird caged on earth,
Who fretted in her prison bars;
A voice from heaven's ethereal blue,
Still unforgetful of her birth;
And while she gazed out on the stars,
She sighed to look where once she flew,
Until her wings at last broke through!

And from my lonelier world I gaze,
And should my wistful eyes once see
Some new star drift down heaven's ways,
I know she looks once more on me,
And by the astral barrier waits
Until my angel swing the gates,
And earth no longer cages me!

## LABOR

WAR not on him! — *his* dread artillery
Doth lie in idle arm and rusting tool;
And lo he sets his ruthless legions free
When once he lets his sullen anvils cool!

## DESTINY

HE sat behind his roses and did wake
With wanton hands those passions grim
That naught but bitter tears and blood can slake,
And naught but years can dim.

So o'er their wine did Great Ones sit and nod,
Ordaining War . . . as it befell:
Men drunk with drum and trumpet mouthed of God
And reeled down blood-washed roads to Hell!

## THE KEEPER

WIDE is the world and wide its open seas,
Yet I who fare from pole to pole remain
A prisoned Hope that paces ill at ease,
A captive Fear that fumbles with its chain.

I once for Freedom madly did aspire,
And stormed His bars in many a burst of rage:
But see, my Keeper with his brands of fire
Has cowed me quite . . . and bade me love my cage!

## THE TWO ROOMS

"GOOD-BYE, little room," she murmured,
When she went, this many a year;
"O white little room, forgive me,
For my heart was breaking here!"

But still with a poignant sadness
The scent of the lilac bloom
Blows in at the open window
And fills her lonely room.

And still she can half remember
The imprisoning walls of white,
And the hours of her lonely sorrow,
And the tears she wept by night.

And still through the years she wonders
At the lilacs white with dusk,
Though her chamber is hung with scarlet
And her pillow is sweet with musk.

For now she is done with heart-aches,
And the midnight finds her glad:
*But the earlier tear-wet pillow*
*Is the one that least was sad!*

## MEMORIES

OUT of the Night we come, and we shall go
Back to the Night: and that is all we know!
Yet clinging to us are deep mystic things,
Vague dreams and visions, dim rememberings
And whispers low that tell us we have known
Some vanished glory and strange beauties flown
That are not of the dust from which we climb
Up to the kinglier pinnacles of Time!
E'er by familiar Doorways are we borne,
And old to us how often seems a morn!
And yet some Hand has fettered close our hearts;
And Life's forgetful captive seldom parts
The spirit-chain, and stands his moment free!
But still, at times, the odor of the Sea,
The silences of night, the rise and fall
Of bells that over lonely uplands call,
The pulse and throb of Music passionate,
The lark amid the pines o'er which the late
Slow-paling crowns of sunset-glory rest,
The autumn fields all golden in the West,
The measured breathing of a bosom deep
In life's vast mystery that men call Sleep,
And life's sad pleasure that is known as Love —

These whisper of the things we know not of,
Vaguely do these at some rare moment speak
Of those old glories that we idly seek
Ere on our dream the doors of Being close,
And all the beauty and the wonder goes!

## THE ASCENT OF MAN

THE gods dwelt nearer men in olden days;
Yea, through the world ethereal feet once trod;
Since now they walk their more secluded ways,
'Tis man climbs nearer each exalted god!

## THE SHADOWING PAST

HE followed me with ghost-like tread.
He dogged me night and day;
Each time I dreamed that he was dead
There at my door he lay.

'Though once I harbored such a hound,
He is no longer mine!
So him at last I caught and bound,
And hushed his ceaseless whine.

Dark paths with many a twist I took,
Strange woods with twilight dim;
Through by-ways thick with turn and crook
Alone I carried him.

His last cries in a tarn I drowned,
And hurried home once more:
*Lo, waiting there, my old gaunt Hound*
*Stood whining at the door!*

## THE STORM

I CAME to you where drenched with brine
  You watched our granite shore,
Where cold between your face and mine
  The stinging tempest tore.

We watched estranged; but while we gazed
  Those teeth of granite ground
A ship that struck, and sank, and raised,
  And ten poor sailors drowned.

Then with a little cry of dread,
  A sob of sudden pain,
You crept to me, *and, lo, the Dead*
  *Brought life to Love again!*

## THE LURE O' LIFE

WHEN my life has enough of love, and my spirit enough of mirth,
When the ocean no longer beckons me, when the roadway calls no more,
*Oh, on the anvil of Thy wrath, remake me, God, that day!*

When the lash of the wave bewilders, and I shrink from the sting of the rain,
When I hate the gloom of Thy steel-gray wastes, and slink to the lamp-lit shore,
*Oh, purge me in Thy primal fires, and fling me on my way!*

When I house me close in a twilit inn, where I brood by a dying fire,
When I kennel and cringe with fat content, where a pillow and loaf are sure,
*Oh, on the anvil of Thy wrath, remake me, God, that day!*

When I quail at the snow on the uplands, when I crawl
from the glare of the sun,
When the trails that are lone invite me not, and the half-
way lamps allure,
*Oh, purge me in Thy primal fires, and fling me on my
way!*

When the wine has all ebbed from an April, when the
Autumn of life forgets
The call and the lure of the widening West, the wind in
the straining rope,
*Oh, on the anvil of Thy wrath, remake me, God, that
day!*

When I waken to hear adventurers strange throng
valiantly forth by night,
To the sting of the salt-spume, dust of the plain, and
width of the western slope,
*Oh, purge me in Thy primal fires and fling me on my
way!* —

When swarthy and careless and grim they throng out
under my rose-grown sash,
And I — I bide me there by the coals, and I know not
heat nor hope,
*Then, on the anvil of Thy wrath, remake me, God, that
day!*

## A DIALOGUE IN SPRING

*The Monk speaks. He is old, but has quiet and kindly eyes. He stands with one thin hand on a sun-dial discolored with lichen.*

I take it, madam, on a day like this
You are most happy? City hearts, I think,
Find keener beauties in this quiet place,
Than we, who live and die between the hills!

*The Woman, who is no longer young, speaks:*

I am most happy!

*The Monk speaks:*

Yet it seemed to me
Your face was troubled, when I chanced to come
Down past the breaking hawthorn!

*The Woman speaks:*

Yes; I know.
It was the children calling, far away.
It was, perhaps, the beauty and the youth
And all the wonder of this April world!

*The Monk speaks:*

Then, you are childless, madam?

*The Woman speaks:*

Childless — yes!

*The Monk speaks:*

I understand! And out of loneliness
You weep a little?

*The Woman speaks, musingly.*

No; no; not loneliness . . .
The whisper of warm grasses, and the rain,
The brooding depths of peace through rifted pearl,
The mellow call and flute of many birds,
The showery freshness, and the seas of bloom
Above dark orchards, and the old, old balm,
The sunlight veiled with mist, the muffled sense
Of immemorial rapture — O dear God,
Are these today not doubly sweet to me,
Who grew o'erwise through sin, who watched too long
By twilit casements and have known too well
The gloomy green of troubled seas at eve,
Till all their brine but mortal tear-drops seemed,
And every wave a woman's heaving breast
And every surf a cry of sorrow was!

*The Monk, turning from the sun-dial, speaks:*

They who much loved, forgiven much shall be!

*The Woman speaks, gazing down the valley:*

And I, who am defenceless utterly,
Look out on life with eyes no longer young
And hear the call of children, far away,
And touched with poignant beauties see the world
About me waken . . . and I weep a little!

*The Monk speaks:*

Dear Lady, old all Youth in time must grow,
And sad or happy as the seasons fall,
We must accept God's will!

*The Woman speaks:*

God's will! Yes, yes,
But what glad Youth, to us no longer young,
Seems not with sorrow touched! Oh, sir, what Spring
In hearts that loved once well, seems not too sweet?
Clouded God's suns should be for lives like mine;
In shade and moonlight we should ever walk,
For with its sweep of turgid waters life
That was not life has laid my spirit waste

And barren days have left me bowed and worn!
For much I knew, and suffered, having sinned!

(*The Woman pauses, and turns from the monk to the Valley once more*)

But softly as the green leaves take the light,
I, with this dreamy air grown satisfied,
Feel stir vague gladness, and remember now
The childish pitiful pale things of youth;
And some old ghost in this poor body caged
Keeps peering out with eyes that are not mine;
And Love itself, immured and bruised and sealed
In trampled earth, still through the darkness feels
The stir mysterious, still at the call
Implacable awakes, and from grim depths
Still stretches forth, and reaches for the sun!
Deliriously, see, I lose myself
In Spring, the odorous birth and burgeoning,
The lyric sap that sweetens into leaves,
The innocent quick gladness that is Earth's!

*The Monk speaks:*

If April, year by year, renews the world,
Why should its beauties not renew a soul?

*The Woman speaks, mournful-eyed:*

No, these are not for withered hearts and old,
Yet I, today, with wider-seeing eyes,
Must watch the rapture and the careless joy,
The call of children, and the flute of birds,
The flash of rivers, and the gleam of flowers,
The happy sunlight and the silent hills,
The virginal soft greenness, and the song
Of waters low . . . The very wine of life
They are to me in my new . . . loneliness!

*The Monk speaks:*

God giveth, and God taketh still away!
You seek the Shadow, woman — but the Veil
Before His face, and not the Face itself!

*The Woman speaks:*

Nay, shall I not more desperately now
Cling to earth's beauty and these broken threads
Of momentary bliss, since they must go?
In mirth so wide may I not lose myself,
And let some April twilight lull away
Each tear and mem'ry old, and bring me peace?
May I not make my heart still rapturous
With Spring, at one with all that stirs toward birth —

With ineradicable dreams still young?
For once, some wayward touch of Spring it was
In my hot breast that brought to youth its pang,
To my great love its unappeased regret;
And now through Spring alone it lies for me
And my pale heart to know life's passionate bliss
Of Motherhood, the presage and the hope,
The far horizon luring fainting hearts.
So let me drink my little day of youth
While bird and child and sunlight hold their lure
Of beauty, bitter-sweet!

*The Monk speaks:*

And this it is
That you call Happiness?

*The Woman speaks:*

Yes; pitiful
The old enchantment seems, yet still it snares
All sorrow lightly to endure the links
Of age, stings us, life's disillusioned, still
To cling to twilight hopes, and be content!
Yes, broken, touched with autumn, many-teared,
Today I am at one with youth and joy,
And through my being, quietly as rain,
The old, sad, immemorial rapture wakes!

*A bell sounds from the grey tower to the right, and the monk turns. For one moment he waits and looks back in wonder, but the woman, whose eyes are intent on the valley, fails to see that he is about to speak, and he leaves her. The woman remains, in silence, without moving.*

## FROM THE POETS' CORNER

(*Westminster Abbey*)

I

TIME was I teased Thee to reveal
Thine unknown Face to me;
Yet grant not, God, that foolish prayer
I asked long since of Thee!

II

Leave me Thy nights, thus gemmed with stars,
Thy glooms, through which to grope,
Since from the dusk of Doubt can sing
The nightingales of hope!

## THE FUGITIVE

A HUNTED thing, through copse and wood
Night after night he skulked and crawled,
To where amid dark homesteads stood
One gloomy garden locked and walled.

He paused in fear each step he took,
And waited till the moon was gone;
Then stole in by the little brook
That still laughed down the terraced lawn.

And up the well-known path he crept,
And through the tangled briars tore;
And he, while they who sought him slept,
Saw his ancestral home once more.

There song and lights were still a-stir,
And by her he could see one stand
(And he had fared so far to her!)
Who laughing bowed and took her hand.

Then out by copse and wood he crept,
While yet the dawn was cold and dim;
And while in her white room she slept,
'Twas his old hound crawled back with him.

## A SONG FOR THE ROAD

THE outland road lies white and long beneath the open sun,
The dust swings up between us where the mile-stone seasons run,
And bent on our grim errands empty-handed outward trend
Earth's children of unrest that night and noonday ask the End.

Yet day by day strange marvels lie beneath the vaulted blue,
And dusk by dusk our road is hung with wonders born anew;
But time and fog between us swing and far we have to fare,
Perplext by one low door remote and what awaits us there.

Yet comrade swart, since step by step and side by side with you
I faced the open day and night, and knew the fears you knew, —

On this, the Unreturning Road, O what's the odds, old friend,
Since in some tavern dark and lone we slumber at the end! —

O what's the odds, that of our Host we have not yet been told,
That cramped the rooms of his dark house, O cramped the rooms and cold,
And one by one 'tis good-night all when we have passed his door —
Let's take the day, and go our way, and ask nor want for more!

So now we have the jovial wind about us noon and night,
A snatch of song, old comrade mine, a merry strain and light,
To wake and shake the roadway ere the falling dusk may bring
Its pensive note and wistful where the outland lanterns swing!

And while we have good sun and star and jocund blue above,
While Earth's red wine of life still runs, our fill of opiate love —

Let's drink our fill, for once and all, and in Death's
dubious glooms
Undo our pack of Memory and warm those darkened
rooms!



## ART'S FUTILITIES

IN youth we have the soul, but not the art;
When patient age has learned all art's demands
No youthful dream within the old-grown heart
Remains to busy our perfected hands!



## REMORSE

RED lips that dumbly quiver for his kiss,
And fondly now but touch his graveyard stone, —
Ah, lips he loved of old, remember this:
*He had not died, if he had only known!*

## A RHYMER'S EPILOGUE

YOU ask if I at Song's behest
  Bared here my heart for men to see.
Bared here my heart! — This stands a jest,
  Old Friend, between my God and me!

For I ten hundred hearts can claim;
  Mad blends of Rogue, Ascetic, Saint,
White Virtue crowning like a flame
  Black gulfs unprobed I dare not paint!

Villon to-day, to-morrow Paul,
  The Wolf confounded with the Lamb:
Indeed, Dear Friend, I showed not all,
  Who know not yet the thing I am!

# SAPPHO IN LEUCADIA

## CHARACTERS

*Sappho.* The poetess of Lesbos. A beautiful woman, still in her youth, passionate in word and mood and action.

*Omaphale.* A young girl of Pharos, dark and slender, simple, rustic, almost uncouth in her shrinking timidity.

*Erinna.*
*Athis.*
*Megara.*
} Three young Lesbian women who study under Sappho.

*Phaon.* A Lesbian sailor; a swarthy, high-spirited, audacious, passionate man of the sea and lover of women, in the careless prime of his youthful strength.

*Pittacus.* Tyrant of Mytilene; lean, calm, dispassionate, ambitious; of middle age.

*Alcaeus.* The Lesbian poet; a thin, thoughtful, stoical man; an embittered scholar of middle age, plotting against Sappho.

*Phocus.* An idle and drunken poet of Samnos; fat and garrulous.

*Inarchus.* An old Captain of the Guard of Pittacus; stolid, grisled, brawny.

*Hoplites, Sailors, a Soothsayer, Lesbian Men and Women.*

# *Sappho in Leucadia*

## ACT ONE

SCENE: *The white-rocked cliff of Leucate, on the Island of Leucadia, overlooking the Ionian Sea. It is a quiet night in early Spring, and the cliff is bathed in the clear, blue-white moonlight of the Mediterranean. On the right stands the Leucadian Temple to Apollo, showing a wall of pale marble touched here and there with gold. On the left is the curving line of the cliff-edge, with the sea beyond. Across the centre distance stretches a shadowy line of Leucadian sweet-apple grafted on quince-trees, in full bloom. Under this canopy of pale blossoms, silent and motionless, at first, sit Sappho and Phaon, watching the sea. Near by stands a bronze fire-basin, set in a block of marble, the embers within it still gently smouldering. The only sound, as the curtain goes up, is the soft and rhythmical wash of the waves on the sea-beach below, which continues in a gentle*

*undertone throughout the act. Once the curtain is up the quietness is broken by the entrance of two swarthy, slender-bodied boys, who walk slowly across the stage. One youth, trailing a shepherd's crook on his arm, blows a plaintive-noted air on a seven-piped syrinx. He stops before the cliff-edge, drops his crook, and peers below. Then he flings a stone out into the sea, waiting for the sound of its fall. The second youth continues to play on his rough wooden flute. The music he makes is the blithely sorrowful music of a contented and primitive people. The boys pass on, still playing. Sappho stirs and sighs, and raises her arms to Phaon's shoulders. On her head she wears a rope of violets woven into a chaplet. Her gown, however, is Grecian in its severity, almost plastic in its loose, full lines and statue-like lack of color. Phaon, in contrast to this, is robed in the softest of Tyrian purples above a mild Phœnician azure. Rings of beaten gold, a roughly jewelled knife-belt, and a polished bronze clasp mounted with alternating emeralds and sapphires, tend to make his figure one of almost Oriental richness.*

*Sappho*

Oh, Phaon, was the world not made for love
On such a night? The moonbeams and the sound
Of music and the whispering of the waves —

They seem a woman's breast that throbs and burns
And cries for love!

*Phaon*

This is our last glad night
On Leucate.

*Sappho*

Then lean to me again
And say you love me as no woman, as
No goddess clothed in glory, e'er was loved.
Kindle and keep me burning like a flame
Until I fall into your arms and lie
As still as ashes. Kiss me on the mouth
And say I am your first love and your last,
The only love that all your life has known.

*Phaon*

Moon-white and honey-pale and delicate
Your body seems, and yet within it burns
A fire more fierce than Ætna's.

*He stoops above her, but she thrusts him back with a sudden fear.*

*Sappho*

Nay, I know
These lips were not the first you crushed and kissed!

*Phaon*

But you — have you ne'er sung of other lips?

*Sappho (with the deep voice of utter earnestness and conviction)*

I have known Love, but never love like this!
I have loved oft and lightly so at last
I might love you! These other men were not
A god to me! They were the trodden path,
But not the Temple! They were but the key
And not the chamber! They were but the oil
And not the guarded lamp, the shallow tarn
But not the mystic and impassioned Sea!
They were the mallet, not the marbled line,
The unconsidered sail, but not the port;
They were the flutters of a wing unfledged,
The footsteps of a child who scarcely dreamed
Of this predestined race with utter Joy!
They only served to bring me near to you,
And on their weakness raise and throne your strength!

*She clings to him again, passionately, fiercely.*

Look, Phaon, in my eyes, and say once more
You will not change, that you will never change!
You are a sea-god, not a man, I think,
So bronzed and sinewed, so unruled and fierce

And jealous of your strength, so made to crush
And hold and battle for the thing you love!
Oh, is it true that Aphrodite leaned
Across your oar, that night in Mysia,
And gave you of her ointment whereby Youth
And Strength and Courage should be ever yours?
Are you more beautiful than other men,
Or do I dream these god-like graces round
About your wilful body?

*Phaon*

Beautiful
You are, so beautiful must ever be
Your dreams; the thoughts in your own heart
Are hallowed with its spirit, as the Sea
Leaves brighter color on the stones it laves!

*Sappho*

Yet men whose years are spent upon the Sea
Inconstant live! They know as many loves
As lands! O Phaon, love but me, but me!

*Phaon*

One land alone, the gods have now decreed,
And but one woman! Lesbos is the land,
And you, you, you, the woman, that I love!

Sappho and Lesbos — they shall ever seem
The only music made by lonely waves
Sounding on lonely shores!

*Sappho*

I am afraid,
Sometimes I am still half afraid of joy
So great as this. Why should I be content
Without Erinna, Atthis, Megara,
And all my singing children? . . . And you say
Unhappy lovers come to this same cliff
And leap into the Sea?

*Phaon*

And if they live
The fires of love are quenched, 'tis held; no more
They sigh and wait, no more their bodies burn . . .

*Sappho (peering across the cliff, with musing and mournful eyes)*

And if they die they wait and weep no more!
O Phaon, why should we be talking here
Of tears and sorrow! They seem out of tune
With languorous nights like this and love like ours!
For I am happy, Phaon . . . All the world
Seems over-run with rapture, as with wine.
It makes me look and wonder, leaves me thrilled

With wordless yearnings, with some vague content
That seems too god-like in its unconcern,
Too rare, too exquisite, for earthly hearts!

*She turns from the Sea to the Temple and the higher slope of the cliff.*

Now Happiness and Leucate shall mean
The same to me. Now all that life may bring
Must seem a broken shadow of this month,
This lotos-month of Love, this last soft night
Of silence and of moonlight and of You!

*She pauses and stirs and sighs, tremulously.*

What have you done to me! I live in dreams
Yet walk in light. I ache and burn with bliss.
I could reach out my arms to all the world
And take it to my breast and sing to it, —
Yes, sing with music that would make it young
And leave it glad, as in its Golden Age;
Sing as the Sea has known no throat to sing,
Sing, sing as Night has heard no lover sing!

*Phaon*

But since you came from Lesbos there has been
No music!

*Sappho*

No; nor need of music here!
For lips that press on lips can ne'er lament,
And song, Alcaeus says, is born of grief.
You, you it was that made the throbbing lyres
All vain and empty seem, you, you it was
That stilled the singing voices, that dusk hour
Amid the tangled mastic, when you bore
Me up the cliffs in your bronzed arms and kissed
Me on the mouth, and taught me that our mad,
Glad, careless youth was lost, and left our world
A world of moving shadows and of dream,
And made me love you as I love you now —
O Phaon, tell me you will never change!

*Phaon*

See, slow of speech I am, as all men are
Who fare upon the ocean and have known
Its loneliness! I scarce can say the words
That seem to die upon my lips, and yet
You know I love you — love you!

*Sappho* (*rapturously*)

Breathe those words
A thousand times, and still some music new
Shall throb and murmur through each uttering!

Yes; yes; I know how at our feeble lips
The words e'er beat and flutter and fall back,
The wings of love are held like prisoners!
If mortals all were lovers there should be
No music and no need of music here!
That much this honeyed month with you, my own,
Has taught me!

*Phaon*

Have you never dreamed of home
And Lesbos?

*Sappho*

Only of those days when you
And I were happy there — those golden days
Down by the sea, those idle afternoons
When you and I and all the world were young,
And from the sands we watched the opal sails
And waded out into the pale green waves,
Wet to our golden knees. Then you would stoop
And lift me to the wave-worn galley deck,
Lapped by the tremulous low Lesbian surf.
And then when evening came, back through green waves
We plunged and swam with laughter, side by side!

*Phaon*

You seemed more water-nymph than woman, more
A child of Cyprian foam than mortal flesh!

*Sappho*

And often, when you pointed out the path
Your outbound sail would take, to Leucate,
Past Chios and Nakaria, on and on,
Past Myconos and Naxos, cleaving west
Through all the flashing Cyclades, and on
Still westward, on past Creta low and dim
Along the southern skyline, and still on
Past thunderous Malea, beating up
The blue Ionian, on, until you saw
The tall Leucadian cliffs so white and calm
Above the azure water — then I thought
You were indeed a god, of wind and storm,
With all your sea-bronze and your fearless eyes.
Round you a wonder fell, the wonder of
Dark shores I knew not of, and day by day
I watched for your return, and vaguely mourned
Each wind and tide that carried you away!
Yes, like a god you seemed in that glad youth
Of dreamy hours and languorous afternoons
When close beside the murmuring sea we walked.
Then all the odorous summer ocean seemed
A pale green field where foam one moment flowered
Along the shallows and the golden bars,
And then was gone, and ever came again —
A thousand blossom-burdened Springs in one.
A god you seemed to me, and I was more
Than happy, and at little things we laughed!

*Phaon*

And how we plunged and splashed deep in the cool
Green waves — like Tethys and Oceanus,
You said it was, upon the uttermost
Last golden rampart of the world!

*Sappho* (*still musingly*)

Yes . . . yes . . .
Then would we rest, and muse upon the sands,
Heavy with dreams, and touched with some sad peace
Born of our very weariness of joy,
While drooped the wind and all the sea grew still,
And unremembered trailed the idle oar,
And no leaf moved, and hushed were all the birds,
And on the shoals the soft low ripples lisped
Themselves to sleep, and sails swung dreamily,
And the azure islands floated on the air!

*Phaon*

Was't years ago, or only yesterday?

*Sappho*

Then all your body seemed a temple white
To me, and I a seeker who could find
No god beyond the marble, no soft voice

Beyond the carven silence — yet I kneeled
And asked no more, and knew that I must love!
The bloom of youth was on your sunburnt cheek,
The streams of life sang through your violet veins,
The midnight velvet of your tangled hair
Lured like a cooling rill my passionate hands.
The muscles ran and rippled on your back
Like wind on evening waters, and your arm
Seemed one to cherish, or as sweetly crush.
The odor of your body sinuous
And saturate with sun and sea-air was
As Lesbian wine to me, and all your voice
A pain that took me back to times unknown.
And when you swam bare-shouldered out to sea,
Then, then the ephemeral glory of the flesh,
The mystic sad bewilderment of warmth
And life amid the coldness of its world
Was like a temple with the god restored.
It seemed so pitiful, so fragile there,
Poised like a sea-bird on some tumbling crest,
Calling so faintly back across the storm,
That one must love it as a tender flower,
That one must guard it as a little child.
It must have been some spirit of the Sea
Crept through our veins in those long afternoons,
For wave by wistful wave strange moods and dreams
Stole over us — and then you turned and kissed
Me on the mouth!

*Phaon (bending over her)*

. . . As I must ever do —
But listen where some restless woman sings!

*Out of the gloom, softened by distance, sounds the voice of a woman, singing to a cithara. The two figures on the cliff are poised motionless, listening, and slowly a drifting cloud dims the clear blue-white light of the full moon.*

*The Voice sings*

When you lie in dewy sleep,
And the night is dark and still,
O that Voice which seems to creep
From beyond some barrier hill!

O that sound, not wind or sea,
From no bird or woodland blown,
Bearing you away from me,
Crying " One shall go alone! " —

Like a ghost that will not rest,
Calling, calling us apart,
Where you dream, Love, on my breast,
Where you breathe close on my heart!

O that Cry, so far and lone,
Mourning as the night grows old,

For the tears as yet unknown,
For the parting still untold!

Then for nights you know not of,
You who lie so near in sleep —
Long I watch beside you, Love,
Long and bitterly I weep!

*Phaon (repeating the words)*

Long I watch beside you, Love,
Long and bitterly I weep!
But yours this music is — it is the song
Called "Sleep and Love!"

*Sappho*

I was a dreaming girl
When first I wove the fancy into words —
I scarcely knew the meaning of the mood
I toyed so lightly with!

*Phaon*

To me it seems
Too mournful.

*The night has been slowly turning darker. They stand outlined against the distant sea, still silver-white with the moon. A sense of awe creeps into their voices as they speak.*

*Sappho*

Yes, to-night it casts a chill
Across my spirit. It thrusts upon my heart
The weight of all the tears that eyes have wept
Because of love, since first the world began.
Felt you my body shiver? And a cloud
Has crept across the moon! What makes the night
Seem passion-worn and old and touched with calm,
So suddenly?

*Phaon*

'Tis nothing but a cloud
Across the moon's face.

*The liquid notes of a nightingale float through the night. Sappho starts up, raptly, listening to the bird.*

*Sappho*

Listen. . . . Like the plash
Of water turned to music still it sounds!
A nightingale! It is a nightingale —
To swear the world is young again, and love
Shall live forever. Oh, my Phaon, come
And creep a little closer, while it sings!

*She moves slowly in the direction of the sound, Phaon still clinging indolently to her hand as she draws away.*

*Phaon*

'Twill only lure you on, and creep away
Between the leaves, and seem an empty Voice
Along the echoing hillside.

*Sappho*

Come, oh, come!

*She goes slowly, with intent and upturned face, walking heedless towards the sound as Phaon speaks again. It grows still darker, and the figures seem almost ghostly in the half-light.*

*Phaon*

Then I must burn a signal to my men,
For I see lights on shore, new lights at sea,
And torches moving by the outer cliff.

*He twists three handfuls of dried grass loosely together, and three times burns a signal from the cliff-edge, lighting his beacon on the smouldering urn-fire at the altar. The drifting flame lights up his bronzed face and figure. As he stands there, peering out for an answering signal, Inarchus and a group of armed hoplites enter from the rear. The men carry flaring torches. Their armor sounds noisily through the quietness,*

*and Phaon wheels about with resentment, eyeing the intruders almost angrily, but otherwise unmoved.*

*Inarchus* (*with the gruff, deep-chested voice of a grizzled veteran, bluff, matter-of-fact, authoritative*)

You, there — what man are you?

*Phaon*

First tell me then
What fish are you?

*Inarchus*

Men, hold your torches close!

*They swing about, circling Phaon with light. He starts back in anger as the smoking torches flare in his face.*

*Phaon*

Stand back! Stand back there with your stinking brands,
Or by the gods, you go across this cliff,
And drink a tierce of brine!

*The men fall back a little, but Inarchus remains unmoved.*

What seek you here?

*Inarchus*

Is your name Phaon?

*Phaon*

Phaon once it was!

*The hoplites remain motionless, while Inarchus bends over a scroll of parchment, under one of the torches.*

*Inarchus*

Phaon, of Chios born, but many years
Of Lesbos, once a ferry-man to Mysia,
And now the master of a ship that plies
From Lemnos down to Cyprus, and still out
As far as Sicily, and north at times as far
As Leucate?

*Phaon*

I am that selfsame man.

*Inarchus*

Ho, Lesbians, stand close! . . . Then you are charged
Of seizing and of taking off, by force,
To sea with you the girl Omaphale,
Daughter of Rhodopus of Pharos, born
A free-man . . .

*Phaon*

Stop! Who makes this charge?

*Inarchus* (*ignoring his query*)

. . . The girl
Thus seized, abducted, and betrayed, was held
Against her will . . .

*Phaon*

What woman need I hold
Against her will?

*Inarchus*

. . . And on your ship was forced
To suffer . . .

*Phaon* (*his quick anger now aroused*)

Stop! Enough! This woman came
Unforced and willingly!

*Inarchus* (*cynically*)

This shall be seen.

*Phaon*

Has she thus spoken?

*Inarchus*

She has spoken naught . . .

*Phaon*

Then who confronts me with this charge?

*Inarchus*

'Twas laid
By one in Lesbos.

*Phaon*

Not the girl herself?

*Inarchus*

By one who is esteemed of Pittacus
Himself, who makes the woman's cause his own!

*Phaon*

And is this man sometimes Alcaeus called?

*Inarchus*

Alcaeus, if you will.

*Phaon*

I thought as much!

*Inarchus*

The charge was laid . . .

*Phaon* (*passionately*)

. . . By one who learned to fawn
Round Tyrants that have taught him not to snarl;
By one who strums on harps and boasts how calm
And water-cool his numbers are, yet was
Lycimnia's, Clito's, Stheno's lover; by
The priest of half-way passion, who is hot
And cold by turns; by him who struts and mouths
Of closet intrigues up and down the streets
Of Mytilene!

*Inarchus*

Cease! For Justice mouths
Still up and down the streets of Mytilene!
Sir, I am of the guard of Pittacus.
To him three witnesses have duly sworn
You carried off this girl, while mad with wine . . .

*Phaon*

They lie, each one of them!

*Inarchus*

. . . While mad with wine,
You seized and took this girl, the sister of
Scylax, the youth Alcaeus schools in song.
Hence, by the new decree of Pittacus,
Who stands behind Alcaeus that the law

May be upheld, all crime in drunkenness
Enacted shall be met by punishment
Two-fold!

*Phaon*

A blow for wine, and then a blow,
I take it, for the fall the wine compelled!
And so Alcaeus thus resents the hand
That holds what ne'er was his . . . and so he fights!

*Inarchus*

He stands within the law, my hot-eyed youth!
He knows his ground, and he in Lesbos said
You should be branded like a slave re-caught,
Ay, dragged back unto Justice by the hair!

*Phaon's quick southern blood is now on fire, and he snatches out the short-bladed Lesbian sword that hangs at his waist. He turns on them.*

*Phaon*

Enough of this! Who drags me by the hair?
Who brands me like a slave? You lead these men,
You seem to be the mouth-piece of this king
In Lesbos who ordains how men shall love
And shall not love! I say this woman came
To me of her free will. And you have said

That like a street-cur with a bone, I caught
And seized and carried her away! You stand
And cry such things! Great gods, no breathing man
Speaks words like this to me — you hireling dog
Of harlot-mongers, we shall fight this out!

*Inarchus*

I do not fight with brawlers of the sea,
With every cut-throat who has smelt of pitch
And carried off a woman!

*Phaon*

Mark you this:
Here stands a hawser-puller you shall fight!
Here stands an anchor-scraper who will make
You eat your liar's oaths, or die of it!

*Inarchus* (*who now holds himself in with a visible effort*)

No, I am here the servant of the Law . . .

*Phaon*

Then say this woman was not seized by me,
Or Law and you are liars!

*Inarchus*

What you seized
Or left unseized, is not for me to say!

*Phaon*

And there again you lie. . . . You could have sought
This woman out, and from her mouth have learned
The truth itself. Instead of that you take
The pay of slanderers, and nose through mire
For money!

*Inarchus*

Check this passion, or by all
The gods of war, your tongue shall taste my steel!

*Phaon*

I feed on steel when cowards such as you
Hold forth a platter! Come! I love to spit
Fat-legged defamers, pompous cavillers,
Red-nosed deriders . . .

*Inarchus* (*beyond control now*)

Stop; we two shall fight;
We two shall fight, you Fury of the Deep,
You tunny spiced with brine! Come; we shall fight!

*Inarchus discards his heavy metal shield, and flings down his spear, keeping only his short-bladed Grecian sword. The torch-bearers fall back and range themselves in a wider but regular circle about the two combatants. Inarchus faces the infuriated Phaon with the contemptuous pity of a seasoned soldier for an unequal*

*foe, with the forbearance of a misunderstood man forced into an undesired fight. Then the momentary silence is broken by the voice of Sappho, sounding clear, mellow, unexpected, out of the gloom. It is a call that is rich and low, alluring and warm. As Phaon hears it he remembers. A change creeps over him; he awakens, as from a dream, and unconsciously draws back. Then his arm slowly falls, down to his side.*

*Sappho*

My Phaon, are you coming? I have found
The thicket, and the nightingale has sung
Of love, love, love to me, until my arms
Are aching for you? Are you coming soon?

*Phaon*

Her voice? (*Inarchus wheels about in amazement*)

*Inarchus*

What girl is this that floats between
The trees?

*Phaon*

It must not be! No, no; not now!

*Inarchus*

Who is this virgin lost in th' moonlight there? —
How many women woo you, in the year?

*Phaon*

She must not know! This *can not be to-night!*
It must not be!

*Inarchus*

How now? What must not be?

*Phaon*

I was a fool . . . I cannot fight with you!

*Inarchus*

O gods of war, what weather-cocks we are! —
This fight you hungered for, and you shall have!

*Phaon*

No; I was blind; I must not, can not, fight!
Oh, more in this there is than you can know;
Yet listen, for beneath the gods I speak
The utter truth! If I have done aught wrong
I shall still answer for it. But this girl
Omaphale, of her own choosing, made
My ship her home till one short journey's end!
It was a youthful folly, and naught else,
A wildness of the blood, a weakness shown
And set aright. A coast girl she had been,
And swam out like a nereid to my prow
When we were in the harbor. She would sit

Upon the galley's thwart and shyly laugh
And talk with me. She month by month would watch
For my return. Then one day when we sat
Alone upon the deck, and her dark hair
Fell loose about her, drying in the sun,
A silence crept upon us, and her face
Went suddenly white and she cried out to me:
" Oh, I would go with you unto the ends
Of all the world! " And when I wakened she
Lay weeping there upon my arm!

*Inarchus*

And so?

*Sappho (from without)*

Are you not coming, Phaon?

*Phaon*

Coming — yes.

*Inarchus*

When you, good youth, have passed a further word
Or two with me!

*Phaon*

Then quick, what would you hear?

*Inarchus*

Put up your sword! . . . I am the instrument
And not the State you answer to. These things
Must still be told to them who know the Law . . .

*Phaon*

They shall be told . . .

*Sappho*

What keeps you waiting there
So late, my Phaon?

*Phaon*

'Tis a crying ewe
Strayed from its flock! Quick, closer here. My ship
Lies yonder in the bay. At dawn we sail
For Lesbos. There I pledge to meet this charge
And show it false.

*Inarchus (impatiently)*

How will you show it false?

*Phaon*

By bringing my accusers and this girl
Together, face to face. If she then says
That I compelled her into crime, I stand
Prepared for punishment. Alcaeus then

Can be disposed of one who crossed his path
More times than once. . . . Nay, send these very men
Aboard my ship, to guard the homeward course —
But as you are a man of justice, breathe
No word of this mad charge to . . .

(*Sappho has entered while he speaks, and stands before the group, for a moment perplexed. Then she holds torch after torch to the immobile faces of the hoplites, still puzzled*)

*Sappho*

But what men
Are these?

*Phaon*

Fresh seamen, for the ship, I signalled for.

*Sappho*

Their faces all look strange. I thought I knew
Each man among them, all who used to sing
On deck with me the Sailors' Song to Dusk!
They all look hard and cold. . . . And this great cliff
Is but the rampart from which cruel Love
Thrusts out its lost, as from the frowning walls
Of War the dead are flung!

*She shudders and shrinks away, then starts, looks upward, and motions, almost imperiously, for the silent Phaon.*

But hark; there flutes
And calls the nightingale again. . . . So come. . . .
This is our last night, Love, on Leucate!

*She links her arm in Phaon's, and they stand listening, with uplifted faces swept by the clear, blue-white moonlight breaking through soft cloud-rifts. The foot-soldiers stand motionless, their torches flaring.*

*Curtain*

## ACT TWO

*An almond and olive grove above the Ægean Sea, near Mytilene, two weeks later. In the foreground is an open space, soft with turf, shadowed on the right by a row of cypresses, through which the pale marble of a headland Pharos towers and glimmers. On the left stretches the calm turquoise of the water. Violets can be seen thick along the cliff-edge, and flowers in profusion add to the coloring of the tropical background. It is late afternoon as the curtain goes up, and Alcaeus is discovered striding back and forth, lean and pale and impatient. A moment later Omaphale creeps in, looks about, and turns to Alcaeus with what is half a sob and half a gasp of disappointment. She is a slender, white-faced young girl with tragic and haunted eyes.*

*Omaphale*

He is not here?

*Alcaeus*

Did Zetes of the Guard
Give you the message?

*Omaphale (still peering about)*

Yes. . . . He is not here!

*Alcaeus*

Then what we two would speak of must be held
In secrecy.

*Omaphale*

I know . . . But where is he?
You promised that my Phaon would be here!

*Alcaeus*

*Your* Phaon! Girl, when was this Phaon yours?

*Omaphale*

I loved him, sir!

*Alcaeus*

She loved him! So, indeed,
Have other women done, and little good
E'er came of it. If this man could be torn
To pieces as Actaeon, or as Pentheus was,
And parcelled out to them he claimed to love,
Still would there be some woman unpossessed
Of this capricious eel, this ferry-man
That swims in amorous tears!

*Omaphale*

But you have said
That you would bring him back to me!

*Alcaeus*

I said
That if you acted as I may ordain
Your lover should once more be brought to you.

*Omaphale*

What is it I must do?

*Alcaeus*

If still you wish
To wed this Phaon, 'tis within the power
Of Pittacus to make you man and wife —
If such you ask.

*Omaphale*

What must I do?

*Alcaeus*

You wish
To make him yours, to see him bound to you?

*Omaphale*

I care not if he weds me, or he comes
And takes me quite unwed . . . if only he
Will love me!

*Alcaeus*

Yet if wedded to this man
You still may hold him, and you will be his
Through every change of heart, and he must house
And clothe and feed you, as the law commands.

*Omaphale*

As he may house and feed a hungry dog,
And love it not! I care not for the law —
If he will love me, that is all I ask.

*Alcaeus*

You harp on love as though it were the last
And only thing in life!

*Omaphale*

It *is* — to me!

*Alcaeus* (*aside*)

It *was* — to me. But I am wiser now.
Come closer while I speak — it must be brief.
If still you love this man you shall be made
His wife. To-night in Mytilene meets
The Assembly, and its Council can decree
That Phaon marry you, if you but swear
That having lured you from your father's home,
By force he took you off to sea, and there . . .

*Omaphale*

This is not true!

*Alcaeus*

But truth it must be made!

*Omaphale*

No, no; I went of my own will!

*Alcaeus*

Then weak

You were, and foolish!

*Omaphale* (*softly*)

Yes . . . but happy, too!

*Alcaeus*

Why were you happy?

*Omaphale*

Was I not with him?

*Alcaeus*

Then do as I have said, and you may be
Once more with him, Swear that, against your will
He took you out to sea — and in one day
All Lesbos will acclaim you as his wife!

*Omaphale*

And *him* — what will I be to *him?* These words
Are not the truth! Why should I seek to hold
His love by lies?

*Alcaeus*

You knew, and lost, his love —
That is the final truth we two must face.
But still the man himself comes back to you
If you but raise a finger!

*Omaphale*

Lost his love?

*Alcaeus*

Then you can keep him close; then you can guard
His coming and his going, and ward off
Another woman's witcheries!

*Omaphale (wanly)*

Ward off
Another woman's witcheries! . . . You mean
He loves some other woman now?

*Alcaeus*

He loves
Another woman.

*Omaphale*

All . . . all these long months —
Was she with him for all these endless months?

*Alcaeus*

They were together!

*Omaphale* (*bewildered*)

And I lost his love!

*Alcaeus* (*bitterly*)

Then say the word, and tear him from her arms,
And teach him what it is to feel the teeth
Of hunger in his heart, to know the ache
Of empty nights, the dragging days of pain
More desolate than any Hell, the years
Embittered, ay, the broken life that crawls
And whines for death!

*Omaphale*

*You hate this man!*

*Alcaeus* (*remembering himself, and reining in his fury*)

I hold him one who should be envied more
Than Pittacus himself . . . I hate him not.

*Omaphale*

From you he took this woman — *'twas from you!*

*Alcaeus*

Mine she had never been!

*Omaphale (remembering)*

But now is *his!*

*Alcaeus*

— Until you say the word that brings him back!
Some one approaches . . . Quick! We must be brief.
Will you, before the Council, make this charge?

*Omaphale*

Would I against him make this charge? No; no!
I cannot! Oh, I cannot! It would mean
His empty body, his unanswering eyes,
His sullen unconcern, his growing hate
For me, his gaoler, and his greater love
For that far happier woman still withheld!
'Twould be like creeping to the tomb of one
We loved and lost, and gnawing on the bones
That once embraced us! No . . . It shall not be!

*Alcaeus*

The law itself may act! . . . if you will not.

*Omaphale*

I cannot act against the man I love.

*Alcaeus*

Quick, Pittacus approaches; we must not
Be seen together. Turn and walk away
Between the olive-trees, and look not back
Until you seem alone. And not a word
Of what I said until you meet me here
At nightfall.

*Omaphale* (*bewildered and broken*)

Phaon loves another!

*Alcaeus*

Quick,
And think upon these things, until we meet.

*As Omaphale creeps slowly and dispiritedly away, Pittacus and Inarchus, in full armor, enter, followed by Phocus, carrying a leathern wine-sack. He is fat and blowsy, and prone to drop off into sudden sleep. Alcaeus greets the Tyrant and his Body-*

*guard, and stands beside Pittacus. Both seem lean and moody men preoccupied with their own thoughts and ends. Phocus settles himself beside a stunted olive-tree and slumbers.*

*Inarchus*

'Tis here between the Pharos and the Sea
These women sing!

*Pittacus*

We know they sing, but *what?*

*Inarchus*

By Pluto's bones, 'tis more than I can say!
But here, as you and Pittacus desired,
I placed a guard, disguised as shepherd-boys;
And honest Phocus as a swine-herd sat
Close by and listened, since he has the gift
Of making song, like good Alcaeus here.

*Alcaeus*

Now, by Apollo's harp, this is too much!

*Pittacus*

Then tell us what was heard.

*Inarchus*

In the cool of early day
They come with cithara and harp and lyre
And plectrum, with outlandish instruments
Of string and wood, inlaid with ivory,
And some with gold, and squat between this grove
And yonder cypresses.

*Pittacus (impatiently)*

But what was said
Between these women? What songs were sung?

*Inarchus*

I am a rough man, sir, a son of War,
Unschooled in twiddling thumbs on things of gold
And ivory. 'Twere best ask Phocus here;

(*He kicks Phocus to awaken him*)

His trade is making song! Ho, Phocus, wake.

*Phocus*

By Bacchus, now, I must have had a wink
Of sleep! (*He yawns and stretches, lazily*)

*Inarchus*

Tell us what amorous breed o' song
Your swine-herd ears were fed on yester-morn!

*Phocus*

What breed o' song! Song fit for one that was
In truth a swine-herd! Sirs, such sorry stuff
That I all but foreswore Euterpe's cause
And turned to honest labor — for this talk
Of Sappho and her school disgorges me!

*Alcaeus (aside)*

But, mark you, not of words!

*Phocus*

I could have shown
Your Lesbos, ay, and Athens, what true song
And singing is, but paugh! they'd know it not!
This world of ours grows worse, sirs, year by year,
And all they take to now is sham and sound!

*Pittacus (to Alcaeus)*

Oh, muffle somewhat these Mygdonian pipes!

*Phocus*

Why, song's not what I well remember it —
There was in Samnos, when I was a boy,
A lean old goat-herd — what a drunkard, too!

*Alcaeus (to Pittacus)*

Who died of a grape seed in the wind-pipe, sir!

*Phocus*

— Who strung, across a shark's-jaw on a box
Of cedar dipped in beeswax, five short strings,
And twanged them with a little brazen thumb,
And made up songs about the early days,
When life was worth the living, giving us
Most wondrous music — that I mind right well!

*Pittacus*

But we are like all Greece; we still would know
Of Sappho's singing!

*Phocus*

Sappho's singing — paugh!
The lady, mark you, sir, I much esteem,
And hold no quarrel with — 'tis but this stuff
Of burning fire and brimstone, and the mouth
Of black volcanoes boiling up with love
That scorches half of Lesbos! I could take
A syrinx made of willows and out-sing
This walking cithara, if only men
Would come and listen!

(*He drinks and settles back, as if making ready to sleep*)

*Alcaeus*

As we do, alas!

*Pittacus*

Enough of this fat wine-sack! Let me know
What you have noted!

*Inarchus*

Sir, as I have said,
This Sappho that you bade me watch so close
Comes forth and talks with them, all draped in flowers,
And schools them in the mincing of big words
To foolish sounding music! What might pass
Between them more I know not. But 'tis here
They come and sit and brood above the sea,
Like mooning cliff-birds!

*Pittacus*

Men and girls alike?

*Inarchus*

No; girls alone — grown girls — fine amorous-eyed
Deep-bosomed women, who should love and mate
With men like me, and bear us soldiers, sir,
To laugh at Solon, and have Lesbos feared!

*Pittacus*

And who shall fear an island full of harps?

*Inarchus*

I am a bluff man, sir, and what it means,
This singing of white virgins, I know not!
But when I was a youth no girls sat down
With girls, and strummed on wires of twisted gut

*Alcaeus*

Mark you his words! There lies the only way
This woman can be met and overthrown!
Since Athens crowned her for her singing here
They wait upon her like a goddess!

*Pittacus*

True!
And for a crown of olive! Yesterday
My chariot-wheels rang through deserted streets
And not a slave-girl watched me as I went.
But on the wharves all Mytilene cheered;
The harbor rocked with roses, and the ships
Lay smothered under blossoms, and a barge
Of myrtle-branches and shrill-singing girls
Went from the Western Quay, and boys swam out

Beyond the Second Bar — all, all to meet
Her sail — the sail of Sappho coming back
To Lesbos!

*Alcaeus*

Yet you always scoffed at Song!

*Pittacus*

And every way she turned were cries and tears,
And every street she walked was paved with leaves
Of oleander!

*Alcaeus*

And you scoffed at Song!

*Pittacus*

I knew no need of Song. I had my work —
My work that led me on by paths austere
And walked beside me with its patient eyes
And seemed forever mirthless. Yet when life
Grew wise and hard and empty, and the friends
Of youth all fell away, 'twas in this friend,
'Twas in this comrade with the quiet eyes
And solemn brow, I found my final peace.

*Alcaeus*

And she will come and overthrow that peace
With other friends — for she is loved of all
Your people, and she sways them at a word!

*Pittacus*

Ay, sways them as a wine-vat sways a mob!

*Alcaeus*

But still she sways them! Should they see her go
From Lesbos, as you threatened, at a word
The island would take fire and rage and sweep
With one unending "Down with Pittacus!"

*Pittacus*

I have scant fear of that! Much more I fear
What this poor land may fall to! Think of it
In hands like Sappho's, drugged with sighs and song!
As well ask butterflies to fight for us,
Ask larks to haul the iron-rimmed wheels of state!
Too well I see it! This shall be the home
Of weaklings; while some sturdier land unknown
To us shall cub rough-hearted men of war,
Men strong and ruthless, ravenous, uncouth,
To sweep upon us with their hurrying hordes
And grind our gentle hands and golden harps
Beneath barbarian heels. Wine, wine I hate,
And Sappho hate — and both shall be put down!

*Alcaeus*

You of To-morrow dream: she sings To-day! —
I thought and sang of both, and neither won!

*Pittacus*

Ah, yes! This crown they gave her — was it not
Once offered you?

*Alcaeus*

I sang not for the mob!
They howled for love and wine and rhapsody;
And to the songs I make must ever cling
Some touch of tears and twilight. It may be
That I, like Phocus there, was born before
My time. So when I saw that I should stand
Against a woman, I withdrew!

*Pittacus*

Withdrew,
And let a Sappho win! It has been said
You loved this woman?

*Alcaeus*

Sir, she has been loved
By many, and because of that, perchance,
She is as hard to combat as to win!

*Pittacus*

I fear no woman!

*Alcaeus*

Since you fought with none!
Nay, strike not openly, but undermine

In secrecy this wall that neither you
Nor I can ever scale.

*Pittacus*

What mean you? Speak!

*Alcaeus*

I mean it has been said this woman's wiles
Are strange; she makes our wives forget their homes
And young girls who have never loved awake
And cry for tender words, and maidens, too,
That kissed o'er close, still seek another's mouth;
Half-mad with music, makes our women leave
Their waiting lovers and creep after her
With pleading eyes, and cling about her neck
And call her beautiful and passionate names!
And all the world has known that all her songs
Are drenched in tumult and with rapture washed.

*Pittacus*

Nay, start me not to storming on this string
That I have thumbed so often! She it is
Who leads my men away, and plants their spears
In colonnades, where rose and meadow-sweet
May climb, and little garden-birds may chirp!
She is the author of our idle days,
Our festivals of folly crowned with flowers,
Our bacchanalian midnights mad with wine

And song and reeling dance; our lovers pale
And silent in the gloom, who neither laugh
Nor move where gleam the white of arms
And marbled throats and limbs voluptuous!
Oft have I stumbled on this cyathus
That over-runs with fire, and marked the ways
Of those who follow her, the fearless laugh,
The muffled stir of torches through the leaves,
The flight, denial, capture, and the faint
Last struggles of some lover lost in sighs
And swooning unconcern — and through it all
The throbbing of the lyres, the drone and beat
Of citharas, the broken woodland chants,
The midnight sorceries, where they who weave
O'er-sweetened words to music sit and dream
By drooping oleanders, flinging lust
And enervating passion out across
This land of lovers! Paugh, I hate it all!

*Alcaeus*

Your people should be told, then: "Here is one
Who would corrupt the rose of Lesbian youth,
Who leaves a blight upon our homes, a taint
Upon our island!"

*Pittacus*

Yes; but to what end?

*Alcaeus*

That where we idle wait the gods may act!
The seed thus planted quietly shall grow,
Shall spread suspicion, and shall pave the way
For grim uprootings. When the time is ripe
Proclaim the woman for the thing she is!

*Phocus*

I must have slept a wink, and known it not!

(*He rises and quietly drinks as the sound of music and chanting voices floats softly up from the sea below them*)

*Pittacus*

Listen, what sound is that?

*Alcaeus*

It is the song
All Lesbos sings at sunset!

*Pittacus*

All Lesbos sings?

*Alcaeus*

The Sailors' Hymn to Sunset it is called;
From every harbor where a tired oar drips,

Or rope is tied, or weary anchor dropped,
This selfsame music rises from the sea.

*Phocus* (*aside, muttering*)

That is the wide-mouthed rubble that the men
Of this mad Lesbos take, and leave unsung
My Shepherds' Song to She-Goats, writ by me
In pure Æolic, in Ionic, too,
That ripples like a rill! (*He sighs and sleeps*)

*Pittacus*

Whence came this song?

*Alcaeus*

It comes from Sappho! Listen; next to that
They call the Song For Lovers, and its mate,
The Sailors' Hymn to Sunrise, 'tis most sung.

*The two men turn towards the Sea, listening.*

And wonderful it is! From ship to ship,
From cape to misty cape, from wharf to wharf,
From harbor-town to headland and still on
To harbor-town it rises, eve by eve.
It mounts and swings until a chain of song
Round Lesbos has been woven!

*Phocus stirs and wakens, rubbing his eyes. Then he shows that he is listening to the speakers preoccupied on the cliff.*

*Pittacus*

I thought as much!
This woman stands a menace and a shame —
She must be silenced.

*Alcaeus*

Then, before I go,
Let me one sentence add: 'Twere best to strike
At her through Phaon — cut the cypress low,
And let the ivy wither, where it lies.
Of Phaon's deeds you know: should he go down,
Her desperate love for him would spell her own
Untimely ruin. Let them fall as one!

*Pittacus*

She has her following, such as it is!
We must strike cautiously. This Phaon boasts
That he has talked with goddesses, you say?

*Alcaeus*

He is the man who claims Poseidon speaks
With him across his gunwale. Still he tells
How on a night of storm and rain he found
A woman muffled in a gloomy cloak,
Waiting without a word beside his boat —
Who made a sign, whereat he rowed her out,

Against his will, into the driving spray.
And all the while her woman's dreaming eyes
Shone out like stars, and through the tempest flashed
Her white face like a flame, and filled his heart
With fear and wonder. And they reached the land;
And she passed silently out through the night,
And left no sign or footprint on the sand;
And he has claimed she was a goddess.

*Pittacus (cynically)*

He
May need her help!

*Alcaeus*

We boast no goddesses
To fight for us, in either love or war;
So we must stand prepared, and wait our hour . . .

*Pittacus*

And when the time is ripe . . .

*Alcaeus*

The gods may act
Where we have been most idle. I must go!

(*Exit*)

*Phocus* (*peering blearily after Alcaeus*)

Now, by the horn of Bacchus, here will be
Eryngo-root to spice to-morrow's talk! (*He laughs*)
But soft — there's one as lean as I am fat.

*Omaphale creeps in, as he speaks. Her face is colorless, her hair dishevelled. She is about to speak to Pittacus, but shrinks away, with a gesture of fear and despair. A look of hopelessness is on her face, as she advances toward the cliff-edge.*

*Pittacus* (*wrapt in thought, unconscious of Inarchus standing so close beside him, in the statue-like immobility of the long-trained soldier*)

The gods may act. . . . And out of hate and love,
Entangled and embattled, she may fall,
As others fell! (*He sees Omaphale*)
And there, I take it, walks
One of her Maenad band, chalk-faced and frail
And rapt of eye, a Bassarid grown sick
Of too much love!

*Inarchus*

It is Omaphale!

*Pittacus*

Omaphale! For something lost she seeks!

*Inarchus*

What seek you, girl?

*Omaphale (abstractedly)*

The Sea!

*Inarchus (bluntly)*

For Phaon's ship?

*Omaphale*

He has been taken from me. . . . No, the Sea
Is all they left me. . . . 'Tis the only way!

*She shudders and draws back, as she peers from the verge.*

But oh, I cannot do it! I am weak!
The water is so far! The wheeling birds
Still make me dizzy! Oh, it is too hard!

*She lowers her hands, looks up at the sky, the cliff, the sea, gazing slowly about her. Then she closes her eyes, and gropes brokenly toward the sea, her hands once more out-stretched.*

But now, it must be done!

*She is on the very verge when Inarchus seizes her. She struggles fiercely as he drags her back.*

Oh, let me go!
I only ask to die — that, that is all!

*Phocus*

The girl would kill herself!

*Omaphale (struggling)*

I want to die!

*Pittacus*

What is this madness, girl? (*She is silent*)
What is your name?
And why should one so young fight bitterly
To go to such a death!

*Phocus (sadly)*

She has been crossed
In love, as I in Samnos once was crossed!

*Omaphale, wild-eyed and dumb, gazes at them. She breaks away, but is caught by Inarchus.*

*Inarchus*

What shall I do with her?

*Pittacus*

The girl is weak;
She shakes and quivers like a captured bird!

We may have been too rough! Some woman's hand
Should hold her, and a woman's comrade voice
Should question with her softly! Tell me, girl,
What happened you?

*Phocus*

Ho, here are women now!
Quick, call them you. From *me* they might construe
One word as an advance, and hold me to it!

*Erinna, Atthis and Megara, crowned with flowers, have entered while he speaks. They carry musical instruments.*

*Erinna (dropping her cithara)*

What has this woman done, to be so held?

*Inarchus*

Just what she did I know not, but I think
She must be mad, for she would throw herself
From off the cliff!

*Erinna*

Why, she is but a girl!

*Omaphale turns away, with still another effort to reach the cliff-edge.*

O Atthis, hasten by the Shepherd's Path, and call
To Sappho!

*Exit Atthis*

*Phocus*

Why call for Sappho?

*Erinna*

Knows she not
The most assuaging words, the softest tones,
To utter to a heart that sorrows wring?

*Phocus*

What, Sapphic music at a time like this!
The girl wants wine, good wine, to warm her blood
And make her spirits dance!

*He offers her his wine-flask, but the girl turns away, still silent.*

The girl is mad!

*He offers it again.*

There is no question but the girl is mad!

*He drinks, deeply, and replaces flask, with lips smacking.*

*Erinna*

Oh, see if Sappho comes.

*Megara*

'Tis Atthis calls.
She answers; yes, 'tis Sappho.

*Atthis (entering, breathless)*

She is here.

*They step back. Sappho enters with an armful of golden samphire, and a lyre of silver and gilded cedar-wood. She looks from face to face. There is a suggestion of power, of imperiousness, in her bearing.*

*Sappho*

Why have you called me, Atthis? Was it you,
Erinna?

*Erinna*

Yes, 'twas I.

*Sappho, whose eyes had met those of Pittacus, in a steady, combative gaze, now sees Inarchus and his captive for the first time.*

*Sappho*

What girl is this,
And why is she held thus, a prisoner!

*Phocus*

Here is a girl, stark mad, who wants to die —
And so all Lesbos bellows out for you!

*Sappho*

For me? But why for me?

*Phocus (mincingly)*

She has a wound
That begs the oil of Sapphic song! She needs
A chain of golden music round her thrown,
To charm her back to life. Thus have I seen
Phœnician jugglers pipe and soothe an asp
To sleep most beautiful! So, since she will
Not drink of wine, let music do its worst!

*Sappho*

Peace, peace; this girl is shaking like a leaf,
She has been tortured by more things than fear!
Why, child, look up at me! You are too young
To know what sorrow is! These eyes are still
Too soft to peer into the awful Night
That never answers us, and never ends!

*Sappho kneels and takes the girl's hands, with a sign for Inarchus to release her. Inarchus glances at Pittacus. The latter nods, as if in assent. Inarchus holds the girl by only one arm.*

*Phocus*

Now, by Astarte's eyes, here stands a test!
Here is the first, so called, most eloquent
Of Lesbian singers with a pretty task:

To medicine a grief, to make this girl
Content with life, as wine might do for me!

(*He drinks*)

*Pittacus*

You, Sappho, you forever sing of life
And of its joys. Let, then, your lyric gift
Lure back to love of life this broken girl
— Ay, let it stand a test, as Phocus says!

*Sappho*

I seek no triumph, I should ask no test
At such a time! For even Pittacus
I could not toy upon a wounded heart!

*Pittacus*

But you will talk with her, will plead with her?

*Sappho*

As I would plead with any troubled soul!
Release the maiden — she will not escape.
Why, you are nothing but a girl!

*Sappho holds the girl's face between her hands, gazing into it. Then she continues to speak, gradually growing oblivious of those about her.*

All life
Should mean so much to one who still has youth!
These saddened lips were made for happiness

And tender words and kisses touched with fire!
Such eyes as these should never mournful seem!
What sorrow is it makes them swim with tears
And shakes your slender body? Speak to me
What is it that has made all life so dark?

*Omaphale*

No longer, now, he loves me.

*Sappho*

Tell me more.

*Omaphale*

His love is dead, and I must die with it.

*Sappho*

No, no; think not because some foolish word
Has passed between you —

*Omaphale*

Dead, his love is dead;
He is another's now!

*Sappho*

But love is love;
Although the torch may fall, the sacred fire
Endures and burns; the broken dream comes back;

The voices of the Spring may pass away,
But other Springs shall bear another song
And life shall know some newer love!

*Phocus* (*aside*)

Now, by the horn of Bacchus, here is Song
Put into use!

*Sappho*

Nay, speak to me!

*Omaphale*

He loves
Another! Let me die! . . .

*Sappho* (*pleadingly, softly*)

. . . And say farewell
To light and warmth and greenness, and go down
To some grey world of ghosts you know not of!
Think, think, what life still means . . . think of the joy
Of breathing in such beauty, dusk and dawn,
Moonbeam and starlight, sun and wind and sea,
The marbled cities and the silences,
The sting and sweep of the storm on night of rain,
The wild surf and the brine-smell and the ship
That brings the heart we love, the tangle old

Of tears and laughter, rapture and regret,
The sheer glad careless god-like going-on
From day to golden day, the grapeless wine
Of music, dreaming music, to upbuild
Ethereal homes for us when we have tired
Of too much joy, the throats of song to lift
Us out of loneliness and give our tears
A touch of beauty, and the last great gift,
The gift of Love, that makes death pitiful,
And paves the world with wonder!

*Omaphale*

All I asked
Was that he love me — and he loves me not!

*Pittacus* (*aside to Inarchus*)

Behold where Phaon comes, mark well each word
That passes here between the two!

*Enter Phaon, who stands unnoticed on the outskirts of the preoccupied group.*

*Sappho*

Tell me
The name of him who has forgotten you!

*Omaphale*

I cannot tell!

*Sappho*

Say where he may be found.

*Omaphale shakes her head, obdurately. Sappho still looks at her silent face, in wonder.*

Then you can hate him not? You love him still?
Could you not steal unto his couch and plunge
A knife into his sleeping heart? And she,
The one who came between you — would you kill
This cruel woman with her careless smiles?

*Omaphale*

I love this man so much that I would die
To see him happy!

*Sappho*

But what man is this
Who merits such mad love?

*Omaphale (looking away and seeing Phaon, in one involuntary scream)*

Phaon!

*Sappho*

Why Phaon? What is Phaon unto you?

*Omaphale*

O Phaon, tell them that you were, you are,
The man I loved . . . tell them!

*Sappho* (*pointing to Phaon*)

Know you this man?

*Pittacus*

Come, answer quickly, child!

*Sappho*

Know you this man?

*Enter Alcaeus, who watches silent and uneasy.*

*Omaphale*

He was — no, no; this means some woe
I cannot understand. What makes your face
So white? You shrink and quiver and your eyes
Are like dead women's eyes! This means some harm
To him! No, no, *I never knew this man!*

*Pittacus*

You knew him not?

*Omaphale* (*the falsehood only too obvious*)

No! No! I knew him not!

(*To Alcaeus*) You, you can tell them he is innocent!

*She starts towards Phaon with outstretched hands, but is held back by the stolid Inarchus.*

*Alcaeus*

The girl is lying.

*Sappho*

Lying?

*Alcaeus*

Yes; she says
These words to shield the man.

*Sappho*

What man? What man?

*Pittacus*

What man would hide and skulk and wait behind
A woman's lie?

*Alcaeus*

The man who took this girl
And loved her till she grew a weariness
To him, the man who bore her off to sea
Against her will, and found in other lands
Another lover . . .

*Sappho*

Then his name! His name!

*Alcaeus*

His name is Phaon.

*Omaphale*

No — he took me not
Against my will. I loved him, and I went.

*Phaon*

The woman speaks the truth! I skulk behind
No lies; and you, my sweet Alcaeus, you
Shall answer for this thing, or —

*Pittacus*

Silence!

*Sappho* (*starting back, shaking*)

So,
This is the truth! — And this the man I sought!

*Phaon* (*to Alcaeus*)

Oh, you, you half-way lover of women, you
Shall answer for these lies — you Janus-face!

*Omaphale* (*weeping before Pittacus*)

We went as lovers, sir, as happy lovers!

*Sappho*

This is the truth, indeed, the woman speaks!
Oh, this is more than I can bear! They went
As lovers, till he looked about and found
Another lover from another land!

*Phocus* (*wagging his head*)

If you would shake the tree, then must you sort
The fruit!

*Omaphale*

Will you forgive me, Phaon?

*Sappho*

Go —
Go to your lover! Go, I give him back
To you! Go there into his arms again!
He waits for you — he is impatient, see!

*Phaon*

Stop — this is mockery!

*Sappho*

See, I have sung
You back upon his breast. Look, I have saved
You from the Sea, that you may kiss his mouth!
Yes! Yes! I, I have saved you for this man!
With words as soft as first-born love I brought
You back to him! Most bravely, was it not,
Great Pittacus, I cooed and pleaded here,
I sounded like a gymnast of the wires,
The glory and the wonder of all life! —
But I shall wring your State with no more song,
And I shall mouth no more, and plead no more!

*She flings her harp flashing and twirling into the Ægean.*

This is the end of love! This is the end
Of faith in man, in life, in every god
That mocks your temples!

*Phocus* (*aside*)

Ætna, to a turn!

*Erinna* (*weeping*)

O Sappho, come away!

*Atthis*

Oh, come with us!

*Sappho*

Yes, I will come with you; the ghost of me
Will walk and talk with you — but I am dead!
This man has killed all life, all love, in me,
All happiness, all music, and all song!

*Phaon*

Nay, hear me, but a word . . .

*Sappho*

Wait, I shall speak!
Alcaeus, Phocus, you have wooed me both —

Sought me for many years, and day and night
Sighed after me! Behold, I am for sale,
For sale to him who takes me where I stand!
I, Sappho, Queen of Song, ay, Queen of Love,
The Tenth Muse after whom the others walk,
Am I not worth the taking, one of you?

*Alcaeus (his lean face blanching at her words)*

And you will hold to this?

*Sappho*

I hold to it!
I hold to anything that crushes him
That I have learned to hate! You fear this man?
Are both of you afraid?

*Phocus*

Now, by the horn
Of Bacchus, lady, I did love you well —
But weeping for it left me scant o' breath!

*Phaon, who has snatched out his sword, now turns on the more dangerous and determined Alcaeus.*

*Phaon*

I care not who he is, but by the gods
Of seamen I will spit the first rash fool
Who listens to this woman!

*Sappho*

One of you,
Which one of you will take me where I stand?

*Phaon*

Who does so, first must taste this bitter steel!

*Alcaeus* (*aside to Phaon*)

This is no place for brawling!

*Phaon* (*desperately*)

What, you still
Would woo your old-time love?

*Alcaeus*

I stand unarmed —
And thank your gods for it! But meet me here
At dawn, and you and I shall fight this out,
And I shall kill you!

*Phaon*

Kill me! I could mow
My way through fields of music-tinkler's throats,
Dig through a mountain made of poet's hearts,
Ay, swim and bathe in chorus-monger's blood,
And face a dithyrambic sea of all
The lean-gilled singers that have harped through Greece!

*Sappho (distraught)*

Kill him, Alcaeus, for he killed my joy
In life; he killed my hope of happiness;
He killed my new and tender love . . . he killed
The careless singing voices of my heart! . . .
Oh, kill him . . . kill him . . . as he killed my soul!

*White with fury, she rends and tears her robes, and sinks back exhausted from her frenzy as the curtain falls.*

*Curtain.*

## ACT THREE

SCENE: *the same as in Act II, early the next morning. Erinna and Atthis, white and worn with watching, face the sea.*

*Erinna*

See, Atthis, it is morning!

*Atthis*

What a night
Of sorrow!

*Erinna*

Like a child she wept and cried
For Phaon, and then paced the echoing gloom,
And asked if it were cruel thus to kill
The man who made her suffer! Then her wrath
Broke forth again, and down on him she called
The curses of the gods, then calmer grew,
And fell to weeping.

*Atthis*

I have sometimes thought
Her love was like her music when she sang

To us at midnight. 'Tis o'er passionate,
And seems as deep as life, as dark as death,
And wild beyond all words! In this our world
There are two kinds of women: one men seek
And desperately love, and some day leave,
Or some day meet their death for; likewise one
They seek not drunkenly, and yet when known,
They labor for, and cleave to, all their years,
And fight back from the world's end to rejoin.
The eternal mother calm of brow, the one,
And one, the eternal lover!

*Erinna*

Sappho has
The strength and fire of each! I love her so
I could not see her faults.

*Athis*

She asks too much,
And ever gives too much. She is of those
Who threaten when they most alluring seem,
Who menace even when they yield the most.
Volcanic are such women: that same fire
Which makes them dangerous and dark and cruel
Still leaves them warm and rich and bountiful,
And Love creeps closer, presses ever up,
Up to the central fires, and mile by mile
The soft audacious green of vineyard dares

The dreaming crater. Then the outbreak comes,
And through the red-lipped lava and the ruin
The world remembers!

*Erinna*

Nay, you do her wrong.
She bleeds when she is wounded, but her ways
Are soft and gentle. Midnight scarce had gone
Ere she grew calm and sought Alcaeus out.
And called him from his home, and through the gloom
Of his walled garden pleaded that he would
Be merciful to Phaon.

*Atthis*

He, merciful!

*Erinna*

Alcaeus said that honor bade him meet
The man who challenged him, yet gave his word,
His cryptic word, that Phaon should not die,
If she but yielded him the little ring
Of beaten gold she wore upon her wrist!

*Atthis*

I fear this self-contained and watchful man,
Whose words are but a sheath to hide his thoughts.

*Erinna*

I, too, I fear the outcome of it all!

*Athis*

If Sappho were but here!

*Erinna (looking about)*

And Phocus, too —
He should have come to us, an hour ago!
When once her woman's rage has burned away,
She will go back to Phaon, for such love
As she has known can wither not and die
In one short night.

*Athis*

If only Pittacus
Would come to Sappho's aid!

*Erinna*

Not Pittacus!
Nay, Pittacus is hard and granite cold,
His breast is adamant, his hand is steel,
And he has dreamed that while this land endures
His name and that of Lesbos shall be linked!
He wills that on each temple "Pittacus"
Shall be inscribed in letters all of gold;
And bitter in his mouth has been the praise

Of Sappho; he has grown to hate her name,
Yet fears to act. But he may make this night
A pretext . . . See, 'tis Phocus come at last.

*Enter Phocus, panting*

*Phocus*

Ho, what a climb! Had I not stumbled on
A snoring herdsman with a wine-sack full
Of better life than his, I should be prone
Beside the City Wall! Oh, what a climb!

*Erinna*

But quick, what news?

*Phocus*

News? News enough to swamp
A galley! Pittacus is on his way;
Alcaeus by the herd-path also comes,
And Mytilene crowds upon the heels
Of Sappho, caterwauling ribald song,
And growling curses back upon the Guard!
And Phaon, it is said, was put in arms,
And then again was not, and still again
'Tis held he was deported in the night,
And still, once more, again, that Pittacus
Has issued mandates there shall be no fight —

While others whisper Phaon hurries forth
To meet Alcaeus and fight out his fight
Before 'tis known of!

*Erinna (at the sound of singing)*

Listen! Hear you not? —
The Sailor's Hymn to Sunrise?

*Atthis*

Yes, I hear!

*Phocus*

But I have further tidings! First, a sip
O' herdsman's comfort! — Pittacus, 'tis said,
Commands these men must neither meet nor fight.
He knows his words are useless — mark you that! —
But purposes to wait, and make no move
Till this fine-feathered, anchor-fouling, swart,
Hot-headed son o' brine called Phaon comes,
As he will surely come, and bleats and yawls
For clash o' swords. Thereat the waiting Guard
Shall clap him into irons; the charge to be
Attempt at murder on a citizen,
The penalty whereof, and mark you this,
Is exile!

*Erinna*

Atthis, I must go at once
And seek out Sappho: she must know of this!

*Phocus*

Nay, wait till I unload! 'Tis whispered round
That yester-night the Council secretly
Decreed that Phaon and Omaphale
Should in the streets be married, publicly!
Now, once in Samnos . . .

*Erinna (to Atthis)*

Wait on my return!

*Exit Erinna*

*Phocus (swelling with importance)*

And mark you this: the less your Sappho says
Concerning what has been, or is to be,
The better with you all! For Pittacus
And lean Alcaeus tooth and nail are set
On her undoing. Mark you that again!

*Atthis*

It shall not be. No; she and happiness
Must walk together. She must live to sing
And make life beautiful with music still!

*Phocus*

To sing? Ay, there's the long and short of it!
*(He drinks from his flagon)*

What song is there in these besotted days?
A life most scandalous, and then a trick
O' mouthing vowels, then a wanton youth
And green-sick maid or two to syllable
Your milk-and-water sorrows, warble out
Your lecherous odes, and, ho, you have a poet!

*Atthis*

A poet who is fat and full of words!

*Phocus (swaggering)*

Now Pittacus has told me, man to man,
When seeking of my counsel, that our tunes
Have turned too amorous, and must be stopped.
And I'm behind him in it! You talk of song,
But once in Samnos was a lean old man
Who strung across a shark's jaw on a box—

*Atthis*

See, see; they come . . . And Sappho is not here!

*Enter Alcaeus, armed, attended by only a young servant.*

*Alcaeus*

He is not here, this man that vowed to face
A sea of lilied singers.

*Phocus*

Fear you not!
This hot-eyed tunny out of Pluto's ditch
Is foaming, lashing, frothing hitherward
Along the Shepherd's Path (*The sun rises*)
. . . And as he sware
He breaks upon us with the rising sun.

*Enter Phaon, followed by a handful of Lesbian sailors; sunburned, graceful, light-hearted fellows, but now watchful and furtive-eyed.*

*Phaon*

At dawn it was to be. Well, it is dawn.

*He whips out his sword, almost gaily, tries its edge on his thumb, and wheels about. Alcaeus, nervous and unstable, not yet sure of his ends, faces his opponent.*

*Alcaeus*

One word, before this fight begins . . .

*Phaon*

Words! Words!
I want no words! My life to-day is worth
A minnow's ransom! There's a narrative
In naked steel comes nearer to my wish
Than words!

*Alcaeus*

But things there are that we must say
By word of mouth. Still let judicial steel . . .

*Phaon* (*shortly*)

These words, then, if you must: I have been told
We two are destined not to fight this fight;
That one who much esteems you will step in
And stop this combat, as you stand informed!

*Alcaeus*

This is not true!

*Phaon* (*determined*)

Then show it to be false!
Quick! I shall brook no quibble or delay!
Fight! Fight, I charge you! Quick, defend yourself!

*Alcaeus* (*aside to servant*)

The Guard! What keeps the Guard!
(*To Phaon*) . But I would know
For what we two are fighting here?

*Phaon*

For what?
You know full well — a woman!

*Alcaeus*

Then, we fight
For issues closed! This woman came to me.

*Phaon*

To you? So soon? Within a night?

*Alcaeus*

Within
A night, since you have said it!

*Phaon*

Liar; still
You swim in lies!

*Alcaeus*

And gave this band of gold
To be a token — Look well over it!

*Phaon looks at the wrist-band, incredulous; Alcaeus, thus gaining time, peers out anxiously, awaiting Pittacus and the Guards.*

*Phaon* (*quivering*)

Ha! Now; yes, now we fight; we doubly need
To know which man must die! We doubly need
To know how stand the gods, if this be true!
No more of empty words! Come, fight it out!

*Alcaeus, about to expostulate, finds no time for words. Phaon, advancing, compels him to fight. The crowd draws closer, in an irregular circle, with groans and cheers as the short-bladed swords clash and strike. Foot by foot Alcaeus is forced back. It is obvious that Phaon is driving him towards the cliff-edge. He is foiled in this by the sudden entrance of Pittacus, breathless, followed by his Guard. The huge Inarchus strikes down the sword of Alcaeus, who is already cut on the arm. Phaon, seized from behind, still slashes with his sword.*

*Pittacus*

What brawl is this that stains our Lesbian peace?

*A Voice*

A fight for a woman!

*Another Voice*

Let them fight it out!

*A Citizen*

'Twas Phaon forced him to it!

*A Sailor*

Fight it out!

*A Citizen*

He fell upon him!

*A Citizen*

Ay, he up with sword
And at him like a Fury! Have it out!

*A Sailor*

They fight in honest combat! Have it out!

*A Citizen*

Alcaeus was compelled to draw!

*A Sailor*

You lie;
He came at dawn to meet this man.

*Pittacus*

Be still!
Who sought a Lesbian's life shall pay for it.
Guards, put this man in chains, and hold him close.

*The hoplites seize and manacle the struggling Phaon. The sailors crowd close, but dare not interfere.*

*Pittacus (aside to Alcaeus)*

The gods have acted . . . With my second blow
We shall be masters! And this man you hate
Will go from Lesbos stained in thought and name.

*Alcaeus*

Omaphale — you hold her close?

*Pittacus*

We hold
Her close, assuredly. The girl must stand
The column of our acts. This Sappho heads
An army without arms, that secretly
Opposes, threatens, thwarts me. Here, to-day,
It shall be brought to issue. We shall learn
What hand rules Lesbos still — and more there is
In this, than but a foolish woman's fall!

*Alcaeus*

Then, I were best away.

*Pittacus*

Go, have your wound
Attended, for excuse. (*Aloud*) But, stop; were you
Assaulted by this man?

*Alcaeus* (*showing wounded arm*)

This speaks for me!

*Sappho enters, panting, her face pale. She is followed by Erinna and a group of Lesbians, bearing sickles and grape-knives.*

*Pittacus*

Assault it was.

*Sappho (authoritatively. Her gaze has been on Phaon)*

Why is this man in chains?

*Pittacus*

He broke a law of Lesbos.

*Sappho (tauntingly)*

Did he drink
A sip of wine? Or sing a happy chord
Of shepherd music?

*Phocus*

Shepherd music! Oh!
Oh! Shepherd music! That was good! 'Twas more
Like spouting sulphur crowned with Typhon's fire!

*Pittacus (judicially, realizing the people before him must be convinced of the justness of his action)*

This man defied the State and broke the peace
Of Lesbos, and must suffer. I have sought
To make this island one of temperate ways,
And late and early I have strained and toiled
To reach this end. Its wastrel years have left
Its name a by-word on the lips of Greece,

And not until its must-vats are no more,
And all its vaults of flagoned indolence
Are emptied, and its vineyards are destroyed,
And all its simpering harps made into swords,
Shall we dare hope to be a State again!

*Sappho (defiantly)*

Then, it is worse to crush a thousand grapes,
O, man of war, than twice a thousand lives?
Quick, Phocus, give me of your wine to drink
To one who knows his Lesbos! That puts blood,
Good Lesbian blood, in me! Yet we had thought
'Twas Bacchus who once called this island "home,"
And blessed our vines! We thought Methymna saw
The harp of Orpheus float to Lesbian shores,
The god's own head washed high upon our sands —
And from the dead mouth sounds of music creep
And crown our island with its gift of song!

*The Lesbians*

That is the truth!

*Shepherds*

Our Sappho speaks the truth!

*Sappho*

Rail not at wine! When Athens threatened us,
And sentineled our shores, and sail by sail

Shut off the Sea, and flung our ramparts down
And left us huddled close, without defence,
And all our cattle died for want of rain,
And drought drove all our people from the hills,
And Lesbos had no water, none to lave
The dying, none to give unto the sick,
And none to mix the waiting lime and sand
Whereof to build a wall against the foe —
Mark you the tale — 'twas from the sunburnt hills
Our fathers tore the abundant grapes, and crushed
The precious liquor from them, vat by vat,
And mixed their mortar, and threw up their walls
And fought the Athenians back into the Sea!
Nay, rail no more at wine, chaste Pittacus!

*The Lesbians*

And that is truth! Still Sappho speaks the truth!

*Pittacus*

To-morrow, then, shall turn it to a lie!

*Sappho*

My people, listen close! This man of war,
This man who walks in steel and sleeps in stone,
While we are ramparted by rustling leaves
And love and careless flowers, this same man
Who would make fortresses of garden walls,
And grape-fields into flashing battlegrounds,

Who would turn amphora and urn and bowl
To sword and pike and helmet — he would leave
Our towns no longer thronging-masted marts,
But tankards of dissension and of blood!
He would upon the lamb drape lion-skins,
And have us known for what we can not be!

*Pittacus*

No — have us known *not* as we now are known!

*Sappho*

He to the kilns would fling our carven fauns
And to the fire our stately marbles give —
Our chiselled dreams that cannot draw a sword,
Our Parian mutes that may not bear a pike! —
And make them into lime for arsenal walls,
And school us how to loathe a purple grape!
Wine — Wine! This island sings on, floats on, wine!
Wine roofs our homes, and feeds our hungry mouths;
Our galleys freight it to the thirsty world,
It makes the sorrowful no longer sad;
It leaves pain unremembered, makes us seem
The equal of the gods; the aged, young;
The sickly, well; the silent, full of song;
The parted lover grieve not for his love!
It is a secret god who stoops to make
Us rich with music!

*Phocus (aside)*

Now, by the horn, her words
At last are wisdom!

*Pittacus*

Stop, enough of this!
There shall be parted lovers that no wine
May comfort . . . Let the prisoner stand forth.

*Sappho (desperately — in a mad torrent of defiance)*

And this is wisdom, this the heart and core
Of that calm highest fruitage that you flaunt
Upon your thought-fed tree of knowledge! Oh,
It maddens me! These icy grandeurs make
Me like a Mænad, make me storm and rage
And wonder how the ruddy blood of life
Could run so slow and pale! You never laugh
And never weep, men say. . . . You never know
The meaning and the glory of the morn,
The passion and the pathos of the dusk,
The rapture and the wonder of all life!
You are a burnt-out kiln, a river-bed
Of aching emptiness, a dried-up vat,
A hearth without a fire, a thing of bones!
You have not found the secret and the sweep
Of Music, learned the meaning of the Spring,
Or known its soft renewals born of love

And sorrow! You have never watched the Sea
Without some miser's thought of tax and toll,
Nor bent above the crimson of the rose
Without some rapine thought of battle-fields!
Though you should live till your last hair is white.
And I and this same man you hold in chains
Should die this moment . . . we have known of life
And earth far more than you could ever know!

*A cry of approval breaks from the people.*

*Pittacus*

Enough of this! Am I a king of sots?
Our cities and our veins have come to flow
With watery wine instead of good red blood!
We are Sidonian idlers of the night
Who pay out gold to have our fighting done
By soldiers bred abroad. We are a land
That women lead, who strum on droning gut
And pipe through foolish tubes along our fields
For years untilled, our roads all left unpaved,
Our towns and harbors still unfortified.
We sit and loiter by the walls that lean
No longer mended, and ungathered wait
The olive-crops while broken lutes are patched
And some new song is learned. *Now it must cease!*

*Sappho*

He says, my people, we must sing no more.

*Lesbians*

And breathe and eat no more!

*Phocus (aside)*

And drink no more?

*Pittacus*

I am a patient man, and just, I think.
I seek to find the light, and sometimes learn
Through error, and advance through unbelief.
In things imperial I have been taught
To heed my people's wishes, and to yield —
But on one base I stand immovable;
And now I charge you with its final truth:
The State, that learns to *act*, endures and lives;
But one that sits and drones away its nights
In wine and amorous dreams, *must die of it!*

*Phaon*

Yet here two men would act: and one you hold
In chains — and you a lover of the strong!
But let me at him, and I'll leave him there
As swine-fat for your chariot's axletree!

*Sappho*

Yes, one you hold in chains, and say not why!

*Pittacus*

What I have done was done for Lesbos' sake.

*Sappho (to the people)*

Who has done most for Lesbos, Pittacus
Or Sappho?

*The People*

Sappho! Sappho!

*Sappho*

Who has taught
You to be happy?

*The People*

Sappho it has been!

*Sappho*

What are my sins, then, that you strike at me
Thus covertly, and put this man in chains?

*She steps towards Phaon, who turns away from her, with a gesture of repudiation.*

*Pittacus (seizing his chance)*

Is this man aught to you?

*Sappho* (*slowly, after a silence*)

The man is naught to me!

*Pittacus*

Then what he suffers must be naught to you!

*Sappho* (*dazed*)

And what I suffered, too, is naught to him!

*Pittacus* (*more assured, realizing Sappho's bewilderment*)

Your sins are those of Lesbos, that must cease.

*Sappho*

And when two lovers kiss, I am the cause?

*Pittacus*

Enough! I say you are a blight and shame
To Lesbos, and this man who lived so deep
Has lived not in the law. Let him stand forth.
You are exiled. In seven days a ship
Shall leave this harbor, going forth at night;
And under guard you shall go forth with it
From Lesbos, and on pain of death return!

*Sappho*

Exiled! He, Phaon, is exiled from home!

*Pittacus*

The people of this isle shall speak of you
As of the dead.

*Sappho (rebelliously)*

My people, have you heard?

*Erinna*

O Sappho, say no more, lest some new blow
Upon you fall!

*Sappho*

Why should I fear a man
Who stands in fear of me? (*To Erinna*) Now shall I taunt
Him till he sends me forth at Phaon's side!

*Pittacus (nettled into anger)*

What man is this who fears you?

*The people cheer for Sappho, and crowd closer, but the hoplites hold them back with drawn swords, circling about their Tyrant.*

*Sappho (heatedly)*

'Tis a man
Named Pittacus, who rules by hate and fear
And guile — whose guards, see, even now must hold

His subjects back with naked swords! A king
That Athens calls the Fish-Net Fighter since
He bore beneath his arm a hidden seine
And when he fought with Phryno cast his net
About the stronger man, enmeshed his sword,
And like a harbor-sweeper, gilled and caught
And claimed his sickly conquest. . . . We were free
To choose our lovers and our leaders once,
And sing when we were happy! Lesbians,
Here is a man that Pittacus has said
Shall into exile go! And I have said
He is unjustly sent *and shall not go!*
Which shall it be, my people?

*There is a cry or two of "Pittacus" from the waiting guards, followed by a roar of exultant "Sappho!" "Sappho!" Pittacus pales at the sound, and motions to Inarchus.*

*Pittacus*

Guards, stand forth!
(*Aside to Inarchus*) I must act quick, or all can still be lost!
This woman is a tigress, lashing bars
Her fury yet may break. One whip I have
Reserved until the end, one brand of fire
To beat her back. You hold in readiness
This girl, Omaphale. When I shall give
The signal, let her stand before the crowd!

*Inarchus*

The trull shall be produced!

*Sappho*

Behold the king
Who casts his people forth without a trial.

*Pittacus* (*wheeling*)

This woman lies! No Lesbian has known
His wrath without just cause!

*Sappho*

Then tell us why
This man in chains is exiled!

*Pittacus*

Since he sought
A Lesbian's life.

*Sappho*

That worthy Lesbian
In turn sought his.

*Pittacus*

Enough of this; he forced
The fight upon Alcaeus!

*Sappho*

Lies! All lies!
'Twas *I*, *I* forced this fight upon them both!
I bent them to my will; I harried them,
And thrust and drove them at each other's throats!
I was the arm behind their lifted sword;
I was the rage behind their cries of hate!
And you, who talk of justice, you who turn
To smite the path, and let the serpent go,
You shrink and wait behind your sullen guard,
And dare not act!

*Pittacus* (*enraged*)

Act, act I *shall!* You hear
This woman's words? From her own mouth she stands
Accused, arraigned, convicted of her crime!

*Sappho*

Nay, not a woman, but the mangled husk,
The trampled marc, of one!

*Pittacus*

*You are exiled!*

*A murmur rises from the crowd.*

*Sappho* (*aside*)

'Tis come, Erinna! He and I shall go
Out to the lonely places of the world,
And learn to live again. . . . Great Pittacus,
I thank you for this banishment! It means
Release, re-birth, to me! I glory in it!

*Pittacus*

Ay, glory in it, for behold, you win!
You override my word, and *doubly* win!
You said this Phaon here should not be sent
From Lesbos. Then in Lesbos he remains!
You shall be listened to. . . . Your word is law!
Release this man, her vow leaves innocent.
'Tis she who goes from Lesbos, *and at dusk!*
'Tis she who now shall watch across the spray
The failing lights, the slowly sinking hills,
The home that is to her no longer home!

*Sappho*

Alone into the world . . . yet not alone,
For where Love is shall be no banishment,
And where Love waits and walks no loneliness!

*Pittacus*

Entombed and coffined from this day you are,
And we shall speak of you as of the dead!

*Sappho*

Oh, Phaon, did you hear? Time was you turned
And fought for me, at words like this!

*Phaon*

Time was
I loved you, too!

*Sappho*

Time was you loved me, too!

*Phaon*

You flung that love away!

*Sappho*

No; no; it seemed
Not mine . . . and for the moment I was not
Myself . . . it drove me unto madness.

*Phaon* (*raging*)

Drove
You unto madness . . . then unto the man
You met at midnight in his garden's gloom!
Is that not true?

*Sappho*

Yes; that is true.

*Phaon*

You sought
The buyer e'en before the price was paid!

*Sappho*

Stop!

*Phaon*

Stop? Why should I stop? Have you once stopped
When passion drove you into other arms? —
You palmer-worm that feeds on passion, then
Advances in a night to newer fields!

*Sappho*

Oh . . . Phaon!

*Phaon*

. . . When it took you forth at night
To seek Alcaeus, when you whirled your wrath
About me like a flail, for having known
A girl, and told you not!

*Sappho* (*panting*)

This . . . this from you!
I have forgiven much. . . . But now there is
A bourne past which I cannot go, a depth
To which I dare not stoop!

*Phaon (bitterly)*

And yet you stooped
And crept to your Alcaeus!

*Sappho*

Phaon! Stop!
'Twas love of you, 'twas foolish love of you,
That took me to him.

*Phaon*

Then must love of him
Take you from me!

*Sappho*

I love him not!

*Phaon (laughing bitterly)*

You love
Then neither him, nor me, nor any man
To whom you sold your kisses?

*Sappho*

Oh . . . Enough!

*Phaon*

Enough? More than enough! To me you are
A corpse corrupting, something hateful grown,
A woman who has passed away — dead, dead
To me!

*Sappho*

I . . . dead to you?

*Pittacus (stepping forward)*

And dead you are
To Lesbos and the people that your days
Have smirched and slavered, like a serpent's trail!

*Sappho turns, in a mounting frenzy, toward the murmuring crowd, her speech growing ever more and more impassioned.*

You hear, my people, you with whom I sang
And lived and loved and sorrowed — I shall be
But as the dead to you?

*Erinna (wailing)*

No; Sappho, no!

*The crowd take up the cry, until it becomes a roar. They advance on the armed hoplites, shouting defiance, with cries of "Sappho!" "Sappho!" The guard close in, grim and silent, ready for the final stand or charge.*

*The Lesbians*

She shall not go!

*Other Lesbians*

No, she is one of us!

*Other Lesbians*

Long live the age of love!

*The Sailors*

Let's fight for it!

*The hoplites are borne back by the force of the crowd, Inarchus stands ready, awaiting a sign from Pittacus.*

*A Sailor*

The sea! The sea for Pittacus and all
His tribe!

*A Lesbian*

Ay, fling them o'er the cliff!

*A Sailor*

Put down
The Tyrant!

*A Lesbian*

Put an end to tyranny!

*Pittacus signals to Inarchus, and the girl Omaphale is dragged forward through the crowd. She stands*

*there, white and fragile, a slender barrier between the two bands of combatants. Sappho, remembering, becomes almost statuesque in her immobility. Pittacus, seizing the moment, leaps fearlessly into the crowd.*

*Pittacus*

Is *this* the Kingdom, this the Age of Love
You usher in? Behold this broken girl,
A maid deserted for the Queen of Song
You clamor of; a girl unwed and wronged
By him, this flashing Phaon of the seas,
This empty shell, this sabre of a man! . . .

*Sappho*

Cease!

*Pittacus*

. . . Whom she raged and stormed and plotted for . . .

*Sappho*

Cease!

*Pittacus*

. . . Whom she honeyed, humored, played you for . .

*Sappho*

Cease!

*Pittacus*

. . . Whom she bound and blinded with her love,
Whom she has gripped and held from this wronged girl,
Whom still she shakes the columns of this State
To cling to, since our Council has decreed
That Phaon and this girl Omaphale
In public shall be wed, as is the law!

*Erinna*

Wait, Sappho — plead with Phaon; plead with him
For but a word, to make this folly clear!

*Sappho*

I, plead with Phaon? And relate how I
Have loved him hopelessly, and once forgave
His wandering, and wooed him back to her,
From exile, and would sing their marriage ode,
And humbly ask a word on why he cleaves
To earlier lovers? . . . Oh, this is the end!

*Sappho's fury now amounts to a white heat as she speaks. It disregards the issue at hand; it disregards the people awaiting her word; it is the last bitter cry of a woman broken by fate.*

I hate this man called Phaon, hate him . . . hate
Him as the living hate the thought of Hell!

And where he goes, or whom of all his loves
He weds . . . is naught to me! Go, marry him,
Meek, white-faced child . . . and learn how men are false,
And how the world is built on lies . . . and how
This thing called Love is but a hollow lie,
And Hope is but a lie, and Happiness
The crowning lie of all your world of lies!

*Erinna and Athis, on either side, support her quivering body. Quickly the disordered guard re-forms into a solid line. The people fall back, murmuring but bewildered, while Sappho starts up, involuntarily, as Phaon is crowded back and turns away with Omaphale at his side.*

*Sappho (weakly)*

Yet Phaon, it was all for you . . . for you!
Oh, do not go without a look, a word!

*Pittacus, at this cry of the humbled and broken woman, is sure of his victory, and at once signals to Inarchus and his men. Phaon hesitates and turns to Sappho, but the levelled spears of the guard are before him.*

*Pittacus*

This last word must be *mine!* It calls the chains
To bind this woman, who all time is dead
To Lesbos! Guards, surround the prisoner.

*Sappho, rising and towering above them in her last supreme outburst of indignation and passion, ecstatic in her rage.*

I, dead to Lesbos! Tyrant, I am one
Who broods and wanders here as long as waves
Wash on your island's shore! Drive back the sea, —
But dream not you have driven Sappho forth
To be forgotten! Where a lover waits
Beside a twilit grove, I shall be there!
I, where he woos a woman, *I* shall breathe
Out through his lips! Yes, where a singing girl
Goes with her heavy pitcher to the spring
At earliest dawn, I shall beside her walk,
And at the well-curb I shall wait for her!
When sailors lift their sails, 'tis I shall breathe
Across the waves to them! When man and maid
Are joined in one, my voice shall chant their hymn!
And where the olive-pickers in the sun
Together sing, I shall be in their midst!
And where a net is dipped, the beryl waves
Shall break in little murmurs with my name!
And where the goat-herd tends his flock, and croons

The songs that once were mine, and where the men
Who shape the timbers in the shipyard's din
Make labor glad with music, *I* shall live!
Yes, where a youth still loves, a girl still waits,
*I, Sappho, I shall not have passed away!*

*Curtain*

## ACT FOUR

*The scene is the same as in Act One, on the cliffs of Leucadia. It is one year later, close to the hour of sunset. The rising curtain discloses Erinna and an old Soothsayer, muffled and cloaked. As the curtain goes up he is stooping over the bronze fire-basin set in marble, stained and blackened with smoke. Erinna sits watching.*

*Erinna*

But are you man or woman?

*Soothsayer*

Neither. Man
I used to be! But much of me has died!

*Erinna*

How long have you been blind?

*Soothsayer* (*bitterly*)

It seems to me
That I have been a blind man from my birth.

*Erinna*

Yet by the drifting flame and flight of birds
You have foretold the future, and worked cures
Where other charms have failed?

*Soothsayer*

Ay, by the flight
Of birds, by smoke, by cocks devouring corn,
By winds, by meteors, by red-hot iron,
By divers entrails, and the drip of wax
In water, I have many wonders worked!

*He gropes and feels about the altar, nervously.*

What is it, maiden, that you wish to know?

*Erinna*

First tell me, what am I?

*Soothsayer* (*peering into space*)

I seem to see
A thrush that crouches by a nightingale,
Yet neither sings.

*Erinna*

But once I used to sing.

*Soothsayer*

You are a singer, eh? When I was young
I knew a man of Leucas who would take
A hollow shin-bone pierced with many vents
And play us cunning tunes. In Lesbos, too,
I heard a girl called Sappho sing . . .

*Erinna*

Heard Sappho!

*Soothsayer*

Ay, the Tenth Muse after whom
The older Nine once walked!

*Erinna*

Yes, yes; I know —
Sir, it is for a sister that I ask
This augury.

*Soothsayer*

What has befallen her?

*Erinna*

She is sick
In heart.

*Soothsayer*

Aught else?

*Erinna*

And most unhappy.

*Soothsayer*

Ah,
Unhappy! Has she loved, or has she known
A man unworthy her?

*Erinna*

Such man she knew!
And now the loneliness of all the world
Weighs on her soul and turns her troubled dreams
To olden days and dark imaginings.

*Soothsayer*

And now her love is dead?

*Erinna*

That would I know.
She mourns by day, and never speaks his name,
But in the night she weeps and cries to him
And through her dreams his name forever sounds.
Yet when she wakes her heart seems dead again,
And hour by hour she broods beside the sea.

*Soothsayer*

Thinks she this lover dead?

*Erinna*

He is not dead.

*Soothsayer*

How could she know he is not dead?

*Erinna*

I sent
To Lesbos and made sure he lives.

*Soothsayer*

And when
You told her of it?

*Erinna*

Then she neither wept
Nor laughed nor spake!

*Soothsayer*

She must have suffered deep!

*Erinna*

O tell me how much longer it will last,
And what will come of it!

*Soothsayer*

Take then this seed
And cast it on the flame.

*Erinna*

What seed is it?

*Soothsayer*

Sea-fennel mixed with myrrh. But was it cast?

*Erinna goes to the altar and casts the seed on the smouldering fire.*

*Erinna*

'Tis on the flame.

*Soothsayer*

The smoke . . . how does it rise?

*Erinna*

It rises in a column, thin and straight.

*Soothsayer*

And still so rises?

*Erinna*

No . . . for now it drifts
And wavers, in a broken cloud.

*Soothsayer*

Enough!
Now take this sparrow. Hold it in your hand,
And face the east. . . . Now let the bird go free!

*Erinna*

'Tis free! 'Tis gone!

*Soothsayer*

How has it flown?

*Erinna*

It flew
Beyond the cliffs! 'Tis lost within the Sea!
What can such things portend?

*The Soothsayer is silent, wrapt in thought.*

What do they mean?

*Soothsayer*

It means good news, and bad. . . . Go you and bring
This woman to me . . . I must speak with her!

*Erinna*

Then gently, speak to her the darker news;
Oh, give her peace — for she has need of it!

(*Exit*)

*Soothsayer* (*disclosing himself as Phaon*)

This is the hour where life and death divide,
Where all the rivers of the world hold back
And wait some new beginning . . . or the end!

O Aphrodite, you who leaned across
My oar with luminous eyes and filled the gloom
With glory, help me, help me in this hour!

*Sappho enters, slowly, with Erinna. Sappho is robed in white, and on her hair is a heavy crown of dark violets, making paler her pale face. She does not look towards Phaon — her dreamy gaze is bent on the Sea.*

*Sappho*

What sail is that? I thought I knew each ship
That passes here!

*Erinna*

'Tis one from Lesbos come.

*Sappho*

From Lesbos! Lesbos! O how frail a thing
To face so many seas, to creep so far
From home! I wonder if its timbers thrill
And ache for Lesbos now? If through its keel
Some wordless anguish burns, when e'er the name
Of Lesbos comes to it . . . as in my heart!

*Erinna*

This prophet fares from Lesbos, and would speak
With you alone!

(*Exit*)

*Sappho slowly turns and studies the soothsayer, who remains cloaked. The sunlight falls clear and gold on the two figures.*

*Sappho* (*murmurs*)

This sail from Lesbos fares!

*Phaon*

Ay, from the land that cast Alcaeus out,
A broken exile, into Sicily;
The land that once was known as Sappho's isle,
And shall again be hers.

*Sappho*

What man are you?

*Phaon*

One who would wait and seek you out beyond
The uttermost unkeeled domains of Night!

*Sappho*

Who . . .

*Phaon*

One who comes to bear you home again,
Still crowned with ivy and wild olive as
You came from Athens!

*Sappho*

Phaon!

*Phaon*

Sappho!

*Sappho*

Oh,
Why have you followed me? Why have you come
To this grey land that is my Underworld
Of ghosts and dreams?

*Phaon*

To take you home again!

*Sappho*

It is too late!

*Phaon*

Nay, you have been recalled —
I bear the Lesbian Council's word to bring
You out of exile! Lesbos cried for you
Till Pittacus himself was forced to bow
Unto their clamor! Athens also rose
And said you should return. . . . And I,
Who loved you once, and love you evermore,
Now plead with you to come.

*Sappho (musingly)*

It is too late!
Dear hills of sun and gloom and green . . . soft hills
That I shall see no more!

*Phaon*

Nay, Sappho, come —
They wait and ask for you, but not as I.
They beg the glad bird-throated girl they crowned
With violets, the Voice they listened to
At twilight when the brief day's work was done.
I beg the woman who made all my world
A dusk of warmth and rapture . . . her to whom
My lonely heart has yearned!

*Sappho (looking up)*

Omaphale —
Where waits Omaphale? Where are the loves
You laughed and whispered to this many a year?

*Phaon*

There is but one great love in any life,
The rest are ghosts, to mock its memories.
All through the weary months I wanted you,
Cried out for you, and had to come to you!

*Sappho* (*slowly*)

And had to come to me! And wanted me!

*Phaon*

Great wrong I wrought you, but I was deceived,
And deeply I have suffered!

*Sappho*

Suffered? When?

*Phaon*

The loss of you . . . the ache and emptiness
Of one who knew all love, and is denied;
The torture of the days that are no more;
The terror and the anguish born of ways
That one great love illumed, that one lost voice
Still like a fading lute with sorrow haunts!
Turn not away . . . look at me, Sappho. . . . Come,
Come back with me where still the singing girls
Laugh, ruddy-ankled, round the Lesbian vats,
And every hill and lowland is your home,
And deep throats from the laden galleys sing
By night of love and women as of old!

*Sappho* (*still wrapt in thought, wistfully*)

How far away those twilight voices are!

*Phaon*

But still they chant your words, and wait for you,
And down the solemn Dorian scale the pipes
Wander and plead, and note by note still wake
With soft Æolian rapture. Still come back
Where droning flute and harp shall drowse away
This wordless hunger that has paled your face,
Where every lover knows your music still,
And every meadow keeps your voice alive,
Where lonely cliffs reach out their arms for you . . .
Come back, and be at rest!

*Sappho*

O island home
Where we were happy once!

*Phaon*

And shall again
Be happy, where the golden vetch is thick
Along the cliffs, and cool the olive-groves,
And all the shadowy fir-lands and the hills
Lean tender purple to Æolia's coast,
And all the harbor-lights still wait and watch,
Like weary eyes, for you to come again!

*Sappho*

Yes, well I know them where their paths of gold
Once lay like wavering music on the sea!

*Phaon*

And there like wine made sweet with honey, life
Shall flow reluctantly!

*Sappho*

O sea-washed home
Where we, so long ago, were happy once!

*Phaon*

I brought a sorrow to that home, I know —
But I have suffered for it, and have learned
How all the paths of all the oceans lead
To you — you — you!

*Sappho*

Oh speak not thus to me —
It is too late, my Phaon.
'Twas your hand
That crushed the silver goblet of my heart,
And now the wine is spilt; the page is read,
And from the tale the earlier glory gone;
The torch has failed amid the falling dusk,
The dream has passed, and rapture is a word
Unknown to my sad heart, and music sounds
Mournful as evening bells on lonely seas.

*Phaon*

But Lesbos calls, and still you will not hear;
Our home is waiting, and you will not come!

*Sappho*

Lightly you loved me, Phaon, long ago;
And there were other arms unknown to me
That folded over you, though none more fond
Than mine that fell so wing-like round your head.
And there were other eyes that drooped as mine
Despairingly before your pleading mouth.

*Phaon*

"I have loved oft and lightly that, at last,
I might love you!" Can you remember not?

*Sappho*

But many were the nights I wept, and learned
How sorrowful is all divided love,
How we who give too often . . . *never give*,
How one voice must be lost, and being lost,
May be remembered most.

*Phaon*

But you alone
It was, pale-throated woman, that I loved!
Through outland countries have I seen your eyes,
And like a flower through all my perilous ways
Your face has gone before me, and your voice
Beyond dim islands and mysterious seas

Has drawn me to you, calling from the dunes
Where Summer once hung low above our hands,
And we, as children, dreamed to dreaming waves,
And all the world seemed made for you and me!

*Sappho*

It is too late; the wine of life is spilt,
The shore-lark of our youth has flown away,
And all the Summer vanished.
One brief year
Ago I could have gone to any home,
A wanderer with you o'er troubled seas;
And slept beside your fire content, and fared
Still on again between green hills and strange,
And echoing valleys where the eagled pines
Were full of gloom, and many waters sang, —
Still on to some low plain or highland coign
Remembered not of men, where we had made
Our home amid the music of the Spring,
Letting life's twilight sands glide thro' the glass
So golden-slow, so glad, no plaintive chime
Could e'er be blown to us across the dusk,
From Life's grey towers of many-tongued regret!
Then I had been most happy at your side,
Easing my exiled heart with homely thoughts
And turning these sad hands to simple things.
In our low oven that should gleam by night

Baking my wheaten loaves, and with my wheel
Spinning the milky wool, and light of heart
Dipping my brazen pitcher in the spring
That bubbled by our door.
And then, perchance,
(O anodyne for all dark-memoried days!)
To feel the touch of little hands, and hold
A child — your child and mine — close on this breast,
And croon it songs and tunes quite meaningless
Unto the bosom where no milk has been —
Yes, fonder than the poolside lutings low
Of dreaming frogs to their Arcadian god!
There had I borne to you a sailor folk,
A tawny-haired swart brood of boys, as brave
As mine old Phaon was, cubbed by the sea
And buffeted by wind and brume; and I,
On winter nights when all the waves were black,
In musing wise had told them tales and dreams
Of Lesbian days, e'en though the words should sound
To my remembering heart, so far from home,
As mournful as the wind to imprisoned men;
— Old tales they should re-tell long ages hence
Unto their children's children by the fire
When loud the dark South-West that brings the rain
Moaned round their walls! And in more happy days
By some pale golden summer moon, when dim
The waters were — mysterious eves of dusk
And music, stars, and silence and regret —

Singing into my saddened heart should come
Soft thoughts, to bloom in words as roses break
And blow and wither and are gone; and we
Reckless of time, should waken not and find
Our hearts grown old, but evermore live on
As do the stars and Earth's untroubled trees,
While seasons came, like birds, and went again, —
Though Greece and her green islands were no more,
And all her marbled power should pass away,
And empires, like an arch, should crumble down,
And kings should live and die, and one by one
Like flames their lofty cities should go out!

*Phaon*

Your voice still falls on my dry heart like dew!
I hear you speak, and know not what you say,
For like a bell your name swings through my dreams!
And all my being throbs and cries for you!
Come back with me; but come, and I will speak
A thousand gentle words for each poor tear
That dimmed your eyes! Come back, and I will crown
Your days with love so enduring it shall light
The eternal stars to bed!

*Sappho*

Ask me no more, —
I warmed the whimpering whelps of Passion once
In this white breast of mine — but, now, full grown,

They seem to stalk me naked through the world!
Too fond I now should bend unto the fierce
Necessity of bliss, and in each glow
Of golden anguish yearn forever toward
Some quiet gloom where we can never walk!
These feet of mine have known too many homes
To claim one door, and close it on the world!
This bosom now is hot as Ætna's, torn
And seared with fires that long since passed away!
Yet had you only loved me, as I asked —
How humble I had been, how I had tried
From this poor broken twilight to rebuild
The Dream, and from its ashes to restore
The Temple!

*Phaon*

But I loved you then, and love
You now! The torn plume of the wing I take,
The ruined rose, and all the empty cruse;
Here I accept the bitter with the sweet,
The autumnal sorrow with the autumnal gold;
Tears shall go unregretted, and much pain
Gladly I take, if grief, in truth, and you
Can still come hand in hand to me.

*Sappho*

No! No!
For good were life if every lonely bough
Could lure again its vanished nightingale!

— If all that luting music of first love
Could be recalled down years grown desolate!
Lightly they sing who love and are beloved;
And men shall lightly listen; but the heart
That has been broken and must hide its wound
In music, is remembered through the years!
It was not much I asked in those old days —
For men have wider missions than we know.
'Tis not, thro' all their moods, they hunger for
Our poor pale faces. As a flame at sea
They seek us in the fog, and then forget.
'Tis when by night the battle-noise has died;
'Tis when the port is won, and wind and storm
Are past; 'tis when the heart for solace aches;
'Tis when they stop to rest in darkling woods,
Or under alien stars the fire is lit,
And when regret makes deep some idle hour.
Then would we have our name sing throbbingly
Thro' some beloved heart, soft as a bird, —
And swing with it — swing sweet as silver bells!
Not all your crowded day I hoped to see
You turn to me: but when some little flower
Shone through the dust and lured a softer mood,
I hoped your troubled eyes would seek my eyes!
And in those days that I first cried for you
And went uncomforted, had you returned,
I could have washed your careless feet with tears,
And unto you still grown, and gone thro' sun

And gloom beside you, and still in the bliss
Of motherhood and most mysterious birth
Forgotten ancient wrongs!

*Phaon*

Why brood on things
Turned into dust and ashes long ago,
When softly dawn by golden dawn, and eve
By opal eve, Earth whispers: Life is ours!

*Sappho*

Once I could listen to you, e'er you go; —

*Phaon*

And still you bid me go?

*Sappho*

Oh, had you gone
While still the glory of my dreaming fell
Like sunlight round you, — had you even died,
I should have loved you now, as women love
The wonder and the silence of the West
When with sad eyes they breathe a last farewell
To where the black ships go so proudly out, —
Watching with twilit faces by the Sea
Till down some golden rift the fading sails
Darken and glow and pale amid the dusk,
And gleam again, and pass into the gloom!

*Phaon*

Then once you loved me! Let me know no more!
The cry of that old love shall lead you back
To me, and make us one!

*Sappho*

Nay, Home I go —
Home, Home afar, where unknown seas forlorn
On gloomy towers and darkling bastions foam,
And lonely eyes look out for one dim sail
That never comes, and men have said there is
No sun. — And though I go forth soon no fear
Shall cling to me, since I a thousand times
Ere this have died a little day by day;
And sun by sun the grave insatiable
Has taken to its gloom some happier grace,
And hour by hour some glory old engulfed,
And left me like a house untenanted.

*Phaon*

No more of this! I need you; still turn back
With me, and let one riotous flame of bliss
Forever burn away these withered griefs,
As fire eats clean the autumn mountain-side;
For all this sweet sad-eyed dissuasiveness
Endears like dew the flower of final love!

*Sappho (abstracted)*

— Yes, I have died ere this a thousand times;
For on the dusky borderlands of dream,
Across the twilight of dim summer dawns
Before the hooves of pearl throbbed down the wind,
And listening to the birds amid green boughs
Where tree and hill and field were touched with fire,
— Hearing, yet hearing not, thro' all the thin
Near multitudinous lament of Dawn's
Low rustling leaves, stirred by some opal wing, —
Oft have I seemed to feel my soul come home!
And faint and strange on my half-wakened ears
Would fall the flute and pipe of early birds;
And strange the odor of the opening flowers;
And strange the world would lie, and stranger still
The quiet rain along the glimmering grass:
And Earth, sad with so many memories
Of bliss, and beautiful with vague regrets,
Would take on poignant glories, strange as death!

*Phaon*

What is this dim-eyed madness and dark talk
Of death?

*Sappho*

Hush! I have seen Death pass a hand
Along old wounds, and they have ached no more!

And with one little word lull pain away,
And heal long-wasting tears!

*Phaon*

But these soft lips
Were made not for the touch of mold!

*Sappho*

Time was
I thought Death stern, and scattered at his door
My dearest roses, that his feet might come
And softly go!

*Phaon*

This body white was made
Not for the grave, — this flashing wonder of
The hand for hungry worms!

*Sappho*

Oh, quiet as
Soft rain on water shall it seem, and sad
Only as life's most dulcet music is,
And dark as but a bride's first dreaded night
Is dark — mild, mild as mirrored stars!
But you, —
You will forget me, Phaon; there the sting!
The sorrow of the grave is not its green,

Nor yet the salt tear on its violet;
It is the years that bring the grey neglect,
When tangled grasses smooth the lessening mound,
When leaf by leaf the tree of sorrow wanes,
And on the urn unseen the tarnish comes,
And tears are not so bitter as they were!
Time sings so low to our bereaved ear,
So softly breathes, that, bud by falling bud,
The garden of our Grief all empty lies,
And unregretted dips the languid oar
Of Charon thro' the gloom, and then is gone!

*Phaon*

Red-lipped and breathing woman, made for love,
How can you talk of Death, or dream that one
Who ever looked upon you can forget?

*Sappho*

You will forget me, though you would or not!
Yes, in some other Spring when other lips
Let fall my name, you will remember not! —
Yet come and let me look into your eyes,
Thus quietly, as women view the dead,
And dream of far-off things! As in farewell,
Still let me feel your hand about my hand!

*Phaon*

Your touch burns thro' my blood like fire. You have
Not changed. Still must I kiss the heavy rose
Of your red mouth!

*Sappho*

No, not till Death has leaned
And kissed it white as this white cliff, and robed
This body for its bridegroom!

*Phaon*

Honey-pale
And passion-worn you seem, and I am blind
With looking on your beauty. Sappho, come —
Come close into my arms.

*Sappho*

It is too late;
Forth to a sterner lover must I fare!

*Phaon*

Mine flamed your first love, and shall glow your last!

*Sappho*

Then meet this One, and know!

*Phaon*

The hounds of Hell
And Aidoneus himself —

*Sappho*

Hush!

*Phaon*

*You* I seek!
The cadence of your voice enraptures me,
The very breathing of your bosom turns
My blood to sweeping fire, and leaves me faint
With longing, makes me flash and burn with love!
And still you would elude me — but this arm
Is strong, and I shall know no other god —

*Sappho*

Cease! son of passion!

*Phaon*

Not until these arms,
Shall hold and fold about you, not until —

*Sappho*

By all the hours you darkened, by the love
You crushed and left embittered, hear me speak!

*Phaon* (*bitterly*)

Thus women change — and in their time forget!

*Sappho*

There lies the sorrow — if we *could* forget!
For one brief hour you gave me all the love
That women ask, and then with cruel hands
Set free the singing voices from the cage,
And tore the glory from the waiting rose;
And through life's empty garden still I dreamed
And called for Love, and walked unsatisfied.
Love! Love! 'Tis we who lose it know it best!
By day a fire and wonder, and by night
A wheeling star that sinks in Mystery.
Love! Love! It is the blue of bluest skies;
The farthest green of waters touched with sun!
It is the calm of moonlight and of leaves,
And yet the troubled music of the Sea!
It is the frail original of faith,
The timorous thing that seems afraid of light,
Yet, loosened, sweeps the world, consuming time
And tinsel empires, grim with blood and war!
It is the voiceless want and loneliness
Of blighted lands made wonderful with rain!
Regret it is, and song, and wistful tears;
The rose upon the tomb of afterthought,
The only wine of life, that on the lip

Of Thirst turns not to ashes! Change and time
And sorrow kneel to it, for at its touch
The world is beautiful . . . the world is *born!*

*Phaon*

Your words were ever tuned to madden men,
And I am drunk with these sweet pleadings, soft
As voices over many waters blown!
And thus you come to me against your will!

*Sappho*

Hear me, for by those gods you fear the most
There is a fire within me burns away
All pity, and some Hate, half-caged, may eat
Thro' its last bar!

*Phaon*

Not till your mouth's
Sad warmth droops unto mine!

*Sappho*

Yours once I was,
And once I watched you spurn and tread me down
And long amid my perished roses lay,
Broken with sorrow, but still held my peace!
But now I warn you that the tide has turned!

Touch nevermore these hands, for my torn heart
Is desperate, and given not to words!
Quite humble have I been, and duly spake
My lips as you once asked that they should speak!
But now this empty husk from which you drained
Life's darkest wine, shall die in its own way.
Yes, yes; as water sighs and whispers through
Some hollow-throated urn, so now through me
Shall steal contentment. Touch me not! Stand back!
Or if you will, locked arm in reckless arm,
Come with me, down, down to this crawling Deep!

*Phaon*

What madness can this be?

*Sappho*

The ocean waves
Are softer with their dead, and autumn winds
More kindly are with leaves, than mortal love
With women, for it kills and buries not.

*Phaon*

You murmur of the dead, when warm and quick
You breathe before me, and bewilder thought!
With but the wine-like rapture of your voice
You make me desperate!

*Sappho*

Nay, touch me not!

*Phaon*

You shall come with me, Sappho! I alone
Dare not go back. I carry in my breast
The edict of the Council. It commands
I bring you safely home, and should I fail
A thousand hands would beat me to the sea.
But in this breast I bear a second scroll,
A more imperious message, writ and sealed
Of Love itself. I shall no longer be
Denied or trifled with, though I must tear
You like a rooted flower from where you wait;
Though I must take you, like a fluttered bird,
And bruise you in the taking! Come with me!

*Sappho*

Lay not unholy hands upon the dead.

*Phaon*

Yes, I shall bear you forth, as from a wall
That totters or a chamber wrapped in flame!

*He seizes her resisting body. His strength overpowers her, and she lies back in his arms, panting. There she catches sight of the knife in his belt.*

*Sappho*

Nay, Phaon, I shall go, if you but wait —

*Phaon*

Too long I waited!

*Sappho*

Take me not by force,
Oh, not by force now, Phaon! Let me come
Quite willingly, made ready for your arms —

*Phaon*

I shall release you not!

*Sappho*

But let me breathe
One brief farewell, one broken last good-by
To all my older life. . . . Then you can come
And take me where you will, and not a word
Of anger or lament shall pass my lips!

*She forces him about so that they face the sea.*

Then I shall go almost without regret;
For ghost-like even now I am; these eyes
Wave-worn as Leucothea's eyes must seem,
And I am tired, and it is good to sleep.
So alone, sad Mother Ocean, let me rest;

Alone, grey Mother, take me in your arms —
Whose sorrow must have been as deep as mine,
Who loved in times I know not of, and lost,
And still must murmur of it night and day
Along your mournful-noted shores!

*Phaon*

What gods
Are these you call upon in ecstasy?

*Sappho*

I call not on your gods, or mine. For they
Live high above our Earth, and scarce would know
The odor of my incense, or how white
My piteous altars stood! Too like the Moon
That looks so disimpassioned over men
And their tumultuous cities crowned with pain,
Smile down the gods on our tight-lipped despairs!
Yet far I am from home to go, and far
From any voice to comfort me beyond
The cypress twilight and the hemlock gloom!
But take me, Mournful Mother, while I feel
Burn through my blood this bitter ecstasy!
Oh, take me, Mother Ocean, in your arms,
And let the cooling waters lave and wash
All sorrow from my eyes and rock the pain
From my poor heart!

*Phaon*

Upon my heart your heart
Shall rock in weary slumber and forget
These ghostly sorrows!

*He crushes her half-passive body still closer.*

Give me of your lips
As once, on Leucate, so long ago!

*Sappho*

Oh, free me, Phaon!

*Phaon*

Not until you lie
At rest, and willingly, within my arms!

*Sappho*

Oh, free me, but a moment!

*Phaon*

Nevermore!

*Sappho*

This is the costliest last kiss of all
Your life . . . and mine!

*Phaon*

I care not what it costs,
It crowns me with a peace — above the gods!

*She shudders, but lies passive in his arms, her own creeping about him. Her hand falls to his knife, which she withdraws, raises, and sinks deep in his side. His arms droop away, he crumbles down at her feet, without a word, dead. She scarcely moves as she gazes at the body. The two figures are bathed in the full golden light of the sunset. The voice of Erinna calls from the distance. Sappho turns with a haunted look, raises her arms, and leaps into the sea. Faintly, from the harbor beyond the cliff sounds the chords of "The Sailors' Hymn to Sunset," as the light slowly pales and passes.*

*Curtain*

## THE THREE VOICES

WHEN the fire sinks flame by flame
And the shadows, Dear, grow long,
Shall I turn for praise or blame
To the Brazen-Throated Throng?

When the last poor deed is done,
Shall I look, O Good and True,
To the old friends one by one,
The Silver-Throated Few?

Nay, all that I strove to do,
However it end, was done
For You and the love of You,
The Golden-Throated One!